

PRINCE REVOLUTION! PRESENTS ½ PRINCE VOLUME 1

THE BEGINNING OF A LEGEND



ORIGINAL NOVEL
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SYNOPSIS

During one of our arguments, my younger brother taunted me, claiming that I only knew how to depend on guys to get me through MMOs. In a fit of anger, I was spurred on by his words to defeat my brother without depending on anyone else.

By some coincidence, a new game called “Second Life” was about to go on the market and thus I started from scratch as a player. What’s more, I was the first person ever to log onto the game. The beautiful GM told me that I could have one wish granted... *Humph! I. Want. To. Become. A. Guy!*

Shit, I accidentally became too super-ultra-incredibly handsome, and now there's a beautiful GM with designs on my virtue, waaaaah....!

...OH MY GOD! A girl wants to make me her trophy husband!

Heavens, what a hottie... Wait, what? He's actually GAY and he's hitting on me?! Go to hell! When I'm a girl you're not interested, so why the hell do you want me now?

With an incredibly hilarious main character, incredibly bizarre companions, and an incredible journey of growing up and self-discovery, how will things pan out? Even God is playing a guessing game...

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yu Wo:

Who am I? Sometimes I am like a warrior, wielding a sword on the battlefield, with limitless passion and energy. At other times, I resemble a mage, with a mind devoted to research, completely absorbed in the things I like. Or I might be like a thief, leading a free and easy life, letting fate lead me to distant and unfamiliar lands. Occasionally, however, I am similar to a priest, with that gentle heart, filled with compassion towards the living things of this world. Ultimately, I am a kindly, fantastical world.



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About Prince Rev!

Prince Revolution! (or Prince Rev! for short) was started in late April 2009 by Erialis for the purpose of translating and sharing the ½ Prince novels with other fans (who unfortunately couldn't read Chinese). PR!'s crew has since expanded to include twelve translators and four proof-readers.

Links

Prince Revolution!
<http://halfprince.wordpress.com>

Yu Wo's Blog
<http://www.wretch.cc/blog/kim1984429>



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Character Introductions



PRINCE:

An elf warrior, “he” is actually a girl, but due to an argument with her little brother, she unexpectedly became the first and only tranny in the world of *Second Life*. Prince has an extremely handsome face, which has mesmerized tens of thousands of women. Unfortunately, he meets a hidden GM, Lolidragon. Together the two of them create a bizarre adventurers’ team and get into all sorts of trouble in *Second Life*.

LOLIDRAGON:

An elf thief, she is extremely beautiful and is actually a hidden GM in *Second Life*. She tends to stir up all sorts of trouble. Because she likes Prince’s handsome face, she decides to glue herself to Prince. They form a team and begin to create a legend together.



ODD SQUAD

UGLY WOLF:

A beastman of the wolf tribe and a priest, he is extremely ugly but has a kind and gentle heart. This guy helped Prince and Lolidragon out of a sticky situation, and ended up a member of their team. He is the team’s leader and strategist.

DOLL:

An angel necromancer, she is an adorable little girl. She is very naïve and kind, always getting into trouble while wearing a very innocent expression, making people grind their teeth in frustration and yet find themselves unwilling to harm this little girl.



GUILIASTER:

A demon bard, he is very handsome, but also happens to be gay. He joins the team after falling for Prince, and is currently serving as Prince’s punching bag.

YU LIAN:

A human mage, she is very lovely and has a mystifying sense of beauty. She likes Ugly Wolf a lot. In addition, she is able to smile while threatening people – a veritable wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Rose Team

Snow White Rose: An elf mage, she is a delicate beauty and once helped Prince to change his class. When they met again, she fell in love with Prince. She is a very devoted and kind-hearted girl.



Fairsky: A human thief, she is a wilful heiress and tends to use money to get others to do as she wishes. She fell madly in love with Prince and did some pretty crazy things as a result. She is very devoted but rather inflexible when doing things.



The Strongest Elf: An easy-going, straight-talking elf warrior. He likes to help others, and has a steadfast personality.



Legolas: An elf archer, his expression is always cold, but he is actually a pretty good person beneath it all.



Feng Wu Qing: A human swordsman. He is Prince's real life younger twin brother, but he doesn't know Prince's real life identity. He likes to adopt the mannerisms of Chu Liu Xiang in-game and loves to flirt, and resents Prince for snatching Rose and Fairsky from him.

Broken Sword: A human warrior, he is one of the newer members of Rose Team. He likes to fight, drawing a clear line between good and evil.

Wicked: A dark elf warrior, he is cold on the outside and warm on the inside. On the surface he looks like a bad guy, but he actually isn't one. He is also a good older brother who doesn't allow others to bully his younger brother.



Ming Huang: A human mage and Wicked's real life younger brother, he has a temper like a kid and a lovely, girly face, but hates it when people mistake him for a girl. He often throws tantrums and can be rather wilful and unwilling to listen to reason.

Changes to the Translation...

For those of you who have read our online version of the translation, please note that we have made a small number of changes to the translation. Below is the list of changes in names and terms that we have made:

- **Fame** (as in the player's stats) has been changed to **Reputation**. This is to prevent confusion if a player's fame is a negative number (in which case it would actually be *Infamy*).
- **Black Sabre** has been changed to **Black Dao**. This is because we are no longer using the manhua as a reference for Prince's weapon. Moreover, the *dao* is recognized as a type of sword in itself, thus no reference to the sabre is needed.
- **Guileastos** has been changed to **Guiliastes**. Guileastos was the name used in earlier chapters of the *manhua*. However, Guiliastes (or Juliastes, depending on how you pronounce the first Chinese character in his name) is the correct pronunciation.
- Wicked's weapon has been changed from a **rapier** to a **longsword**. Although his weapon in the *manhua* is a rapier, we are no longer using the manhua as reference. In the novels, Wicked's weapon is described as a double-edged sword with a relatively thin blade.
- **Adventurers' Competition** has been changed to **Adventurers' Tournament**.

Furthermore, we have standardized the English used to US English. We will be updating the online version of our translations to reflect all changes made.

• Chapter 1 •

The Birth of a Prince

It is the year 2100 AD. As a result of technological advancements – such as the advent of virtual reality, and the creation of sleep-based game machines – online gaming has rapidly developed over the years.

Thus, the realism of online games has increased from 50%...60%...70%...to 80%. The current market is dominated by two MMO¹ giants – *The World* and *Life* – both of which have achieved a realism level of 85%. With over 80% of the human population making up the number of players, the first thing that anyone asks of a new acquaintance is, “Are you from *The World* or *Life*? ”

However, things have begun to change. The world’s largest technology company has caused a huge stir with its revelation: after ten years of research, they have created *Second Life*, the latest game with a realism level of 99%.

And now the entire world waits with bated breath...

¹ **MMO:** This stands for “Massively Multiplayer Online” and refers to video games that may support huge numbers of players at any one time. These games are usually played via the Internet. One subcategory of the MMO is the MMORPG, or “Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game”. *Second Life* is an MMORPG.

Online, in The World...

"Bro, look, what do you think this is?"

I, Feng Xiao Xiao, raised the "Blue River Goddess" wand, showing it off to my younger twin brother. *Haha!* With a magic power of 102, and the property of raising the power of ice-based attacks by 20%, the "Blue River Goddess" was definitely a mage's treasure. It had taken quite a bit of effort to wheedle my husband into buying it.

"The 'Blue River Goddess'? What the heck, Sis; doesn't this wand cost a hundred thousand gold? Where did you get the money? Did you win the lottery or something?" Feng Wu Qing – who happened to be my real life younger brother – asked, staring at the wand in my hand.

"My husband gave it to me, obviously," I replied smugly, still showing off.

"Another gift from my brother-in-law... It must be nice to be a woman, with equipment delivered to your doorstep automatically, and no need to work hard for it on your own," Feng Wu Qing muttered.

"What did you say?!" My eyebrows furrowed as I focused. A bolt of ice – a mid-level spell – flew towards him.

Being a warrior, Feng Wu Qing's magical resistance was insubstantial. His HP instantly decreased by half. Considering that the amount of pain felt in-game was only 20% of what one would feel in reality, this ice bolt would probably have been about as painful as being cut with a kitchen knife. *Wait, wouldn't that be...very painful?!* I realized.

"Hey, that hurts like hell! Cut it out, will you?" Seeing that he'd lost half his health, Feng Wu Qing had no choice but to start gulping down health potions. "Bitch..."

"What..."

You dare to call me a bitch? Or I should say: If you – a mere level 95 warrior – dare to mouth off at me – a level 115 mage... You must want to DIE! Enraged, I completely forgot that the person before me was my brother and cast a high-level spell, blasting him away with a blizzard. All of a sudden, I realized what I had done. Shit, Wu Qing couldn't have died now, could he?

"Urgh..." From the sound of my brother's pitiful groan, it must have hurt really badly... *Sorry, Bro.*

"Damn bitch, crazy woman, stupid Sis! Are you trying to kill me?!" Feng Wu Qing wheezed, lying on the ground in half-dead state. Seeing that he was still alive, I felt overcome with relief.

"Who told you to call me a bitch? Besides, your level and equipment are too pathetic, if you collapse after a mere bolt of ice and a blizzard. I could just step on you and you'd have the fortune of becoming the first warrior ever to be stomped to death by a mage." Seeing that Wu Qing was still alive, I couldn't resist mocking him further.

Lying on the ground, Feng Wu Qing seemed to have been shamed into anger, for he answered coldly. "Who wants to be as shameless as you?! Always asking guys to give you equipment or to help you level, always hiding at the back of a party, always ninja-ing the good loot... It'd be ridiculous if you were still low-level and wearing crap gear!"

Infuriated, I could feel the heat rising in my cheeks. "I... I..." *feel a bit guilty...*

Seeing that I was speechless, Feng Wu Qing decided to rub salt in my wound. *Being so blunt, is he really my brother?* "I'm not done talking yet. You women only know how to beg others to give you gear and to help you level, always picking classes that will allow you to hide and gain experience from afar."

I stamped my foot on the ground. "Fine, why don't we reroll² and see who levels up faster?"

Feng Wu Qing sneered. "Forget it. What's the point of rerolling? Brother-in-law will still help you and there will still be a horde of guys who would power-level³ you and give you equipment."

"That's because they want to, it's got nothing to do with me!"

"Then just don't accept it and train on your own!"

"But it'd be such a waste..." I said in a small voice.

"Hmph!" Feng Wu Qing looked at me coldly.

I felt my anger rise, but just when I was about to open my mouth and continue arguing with him, an extremely fast boss fire monkey suddenly appeared from behind my brother. Rushing towards us at lightning speed, it struck my brother's head with a powerful blow. *Could it be a grudge*, I wondered...

<System notice: Feng Wu Qing -135HP, Feng Wu Qing HP=0, Status: Dead>

² **Reroll:** Gamer lingo for creating one's character from scratch over again; may sometimes involve change of class (e.g. from a mage to a priest) or spec (e.g. from a fire mage to a frost mage).

³ **Power-level:** Gamer lingo for when a comparatively high-level character helps a comparatively low-level character level up multiple times by running them through quests, areas, fights, dungeons, etc.

Stunned, I watched helplessly as my brother turned into a pillar of light and shot off into the sky. After dying in the game, one would always turn into a pillar of light and fly back to the rebirth point.

Oh shit, my brother died... I was in deep trouble. According to *The World*'s sick rules, if killed by a mob,⁴ one's level would return to level one. *He is so going to give me grief*, I thought, breaking out into a cold sweat. I had clean forgotten, however, that the boss was still in front of me – except now I was a mage without a warrior for a meat-shield...

"Urgh..." I, who had never died before, tasted death for the first time. *So death feels this horrible...* I hurriedly removed the game helmet and began to hurl.

"You died?" I raised my head and saw my brother looking at me with an expression of incomprehension. He had rushed over from his room in order to scold me for causing him to revert to level one, but now...he was still going to scold me anyway. "You idiot! Why didn't you use a scroll of recall⁵ when you saw me die?"

"I was too stunned to react when I saw you die!"

I looked at him miserably. How could I have known that in the few seconds that I froze up, that damn monkey boss and his monkey descendants would turn me into a pillar of light in the blink of an eye?

"My bad for getting you killed..."

"Forget it; after all, I'm not going to play *The World* anymore."

"Huh? You're not playing? Why?"

My little brother – I guess I should mention this: His name is Feng Yang Ming, and mine is Feng Lan – looked at me with an exasperated expression. "Don't you know that *Second Life* is coming out?"

"*Second Life?*" I repeated, confused.

My brother immediately stared at me as though I was an idiot.

⁴ **Mob:** Shortened form of "mobile object", which is gamer lingo for anything that is non-player and can be killed for experience, quests, etc. It is used interchangeably in most (but not all) cases with "monster".

⁵ **Scroll of recall:** In this case, a scroll used by the player to teleport them away to a city or a safe place. A WoW equivalent would be the Hearthstone or a mage/shaman's teleportation spell.

"Second Life is the latest virtual reality game, with a realism level of 99%. It's said that you can even feel the wind blowing on your face and hear the soft chirp of insects, to the point where it feels like you're in the real world."

I frowned, my eyebrows furrowing. "Then wouldn't it be really painful? If you get hurt..."

"Gah! You women are always scared of pain. With a realism level of 99%, who gives a damn about the pain?" That damn brother of mine looked at me with an irritatingly superior expression, and added, "Don't worry, the pain felt has only been raised to 30%."

I went, "Oh," but still I couldn't help thinking, *Hmph, to think that you were crying out from the pain just now. If they'd really raised the bar to 99%, I doubt you could still say that you don't give a damn about the pain!* However, since I'd only just gotten him killed, I didn't dare to make so much as a peep. "So you're not playing *The World* anymore then?"

"Please. Everyone who's playing *The World* and *Life* now is just waiting for *Second Life* to come out. Once *Second Life* is out, both *The World* and *Life* will probably just shut down!"

"Then I guess I'll go play that too." A realism level of 99% did sound rather attractive and since I was going to have to retrain, I might as well start over in *Second Life*.

"You're going to use that 'give me equipment and help me level' skill again, huh."

Now I was pissed off. "Feng. Yang. Ming. I'm warning you... This time I'm definitely not going to get anyone to help me or give me equipment, so don't come complaining to me if you level up slower than me."

"As if I would level up slower than you."

We two siblings glared lightning bolts at one another.

I picked up the game cartridge, muttering darkly to myself. *Stupid brother, I'm so going to out-level you and I'm going to leave you with absolutely no room to complain.* I jammed the game cartridge vengefully into the game helmet and glanced at the clock. Seeing that it was time, I put the helmet on and was planning to rush straight into the game and train so fast that he couldn't even catch up. I had forgotten, however, that I'd adjusted my clock to be five minutes earlier than the actual time, so that I would always be punctual for appointments...

Why is it pitch black? Just as my head was bursting with questions, a bright light flooded in before my eyes and an extraordinary beauty appeared before me. Hmph! Not another beauty! It's damn annoying! Don't these game developers know that girls also play computer games? Why don't they ever make some eye candy to welcome us girls?

"Hello, and welcome to *Second Life*. This is your first time playing, so please give us a moment to scan your body and record your vocal frequency. That way, you will be able to immediately enter the game once you put the game helmet on."

I waited silently for the scanning process to complete.

"Right, now you may begin to create your character. Before you proceed, I must remind you that you will only have one chance to create a character. Once created, your race, name, and appearance cannot be changed."

"Then I can't recreate my character?" *Aren't they overdoing it with such strict rules?*

"In order to preserve the realism of *Second Life*, each person may only have one account and one character, without exception."

"Then what happens if my character dies?" *Don't tell me that I'll never be able to play again...?*

"If your character dies, you will be returned to the rebirth point. As a penalty, you will be demoted a level."

What bizarre rules, I thought, dazed.

"Would you like to begin creating your character?"

"Oh, sure. Begin!"

"Please select a race." The ultra-beautiful NPC⁶ had barely finished speaking when the originally empty scene was suddenly filled with tons of seemingly living characters, all posing in front of me. The races ranged from humans, elves, dark elves, dwarves, demons, holymen, beastmen (sub-species included wolves, birds, wildcats, etc) to spirits (with ten sub-categories, including tree spirits, flower spirits, etc). My eyes began to spin. *Good grief, what am I to do! And why is there such a wide variety of races?*

Seeing my overwhelmed expression, the gorgeous NPC kindly offered, "Pick whichever race you like first; I will explain it to you. And take your time, since you won't get to reroll!"

⁶ **Non-player Character (NPC):** In MMOs, NPCs usually refer to characters that are not under the control of players, but are usually either allied with or neutral toward the players.

I looked at the beauty gratefully; she suddenly seemed even lovelier than before...

"What are the racial characteristics for humans?"

"Humans' racial characteristic is their all-roundedness. For example, their physique may not compare to beastmen and their agility may not compare to elves, but their agility is higher than beastmen and their physique is stronger than that of elves."

"I see..."

Seeing that it was about the same as in other games, I began to fret. *Since race is something that cannot be changed, I thought, what should I pick?*

This time I want to be a warrior, I thought, still provoked by my brother's words... That damn brother of mine, actually saying that I am scared of pain and only know how to hide! Just you wait and see; I'll play a warrior.

From what I'd heard, humans and beastmen were the best for this class... "In that case, can I see what I'll look like as a human and as a beast?" It was never good to judge a book by its cover, but a girl couldn't help wanting to look pretty...

"Sure," said the beauty, and two versions of "me" appeared. As expected, the human "me" was much better looking, but just as I was about to say that I wanted to play as a human, my dratted brother's words came floating back into my head.

"Forget it, what's the point of rerolling? Brother-in-law will still help you, and there will still be a horde of guys who would power-level you and give you equipment..."

Damn it, if I appeared before him looking all nice and pretty, he definitely wouldn't believe that I did all the hard work myself. With that thought, I blurted out on impulse, "Could you make me more masculine?"

"You want to be a guy?" The beauty looked rather astonished and attempted to persuade me to recant my request. "You'd better think this through carefully. You won't be able to change how you look."

I began to waver...

"Plus girls have an easier time leveling up, with guys willing to help them and take care of them."

Hearing that, I got even more pissed off. "I don't care."

“Give me a moment. I’ll need to talk this over with the higher-ups.” With that, she suddenly froze, not moving so much as a muscle.

So she's actually a GM...⁷ Her expression was so stiff that I actually mistook her for an NPC!

After a while, the beauty moved again, and her expression was hesitant. “Although the changing of gender is usually prohibited, you are the first player ever to log on. Earlier we had decided fulfill to any request from the first player, so long as it is reasonable, as a reward. As for your request... After discussing it, we have decided that since you will be the only exception, this should not affect the game. We will approve your request.”

Just as she’d finished speaking, a handsome and noble-looking young man appeared before my eyes. *Wow, how handsome! Looks like I’m much more suited to being a man than a woman...*

“You can choose to beautify or uglify yourself by 30%.”

I didn’t even have to think about my answer. “Beautify by 30.”

An incredibly stunning young man immediately appeared before my eyes. *This is me? Good lord, what an unbelievably gorgeous man...* Salivating even as I looked at the male version of myself, I thought, *if I’m this good-looking as a human, then...*

“I want to see myself as an elf.”

A slender, long-eared elf appeared before my eyes. Seeing that slender figure, together with that beautiful face with its delicate, gorgeous features...

“So handsome...” The beautiful GM and I sighed lustily at the same time.

“Hey, will you consider going for a sex-change operation? If you become a guy, I’ll definitely be your girlfriend,” the GM couldn’t resist saying.

What am I supposed to say to something like that?

“Alright, then it’s decided. It’ll be an elf!” That wasn’t me—that was the beautiful GM.

“This...” I said dazedly. “But I want to be a warrior...”

⁷ **Game Master (GM):** A rather old term, often used in RPGs such as D&D, as well as in MMORPGs such as WoW. In the first scenario, it refers to a person who is in charge of managing the role-playing game such that all players’ scenarios fit together coherently (among other things). In the latter scenario, the GM plays a similar role, although in a different capacity; they deal with bugs, player complaints, spam on trade and other channels, etc. GMs are also often said to have access to secret weapons, areas, etc.

"Ha! Please, check out how handsome you are. It would practically be a sin against nature if you don't choose to be an elf. No matter what, you *must* become an elf." The beautiful GM was actually cajoling me... I could feel goosebumps all over.

Looks like she's not thinking of me as a female anymore, I thought. But... Looking at the male version of myself standing before my eyes, it was just too gorgeous... Oh no, what if the only thing I want to do after logging in is stare at my own reflection?

"Then it's decided. Do you want to change your hairstyle or height?" *Wait just a second, are you a GM or not? You're deciding everything for me!*

"Let's try changing it to blonde," I said helplessly.

After two hours of arguing back and forth, we finally decided on the...appearance. The beautiful GM even managed to raise the amount of beautification to 40%, which left me wondering, *is she really a GM or not?* Looking at that ultra good-looking elf with a head of short, white hair, I figured that even in the game, the chance of me turning heads was still guaranteed to be 200%. Staring non-stop, my eyes turned into two hearts again. *Good lord, does this count as being a narcissist?*

"All done. It's perfect," Lolidragon said with an air of satisfaction. Lolidragon was the name of that beautiful GM... She even told me to PM⁸ her whenever I wanted.

"Please... Can we move on? I'm probably the first person in history to spend over two hours and *still* not have finished creating a character."

"Then what do you want to be called? I'm warning you, you're *not* allowed to use an awful-sounding name!"

... She's actually admonishing me? I was speechless. This is bad. I've always used Feng Xiao Xiao as my name when playing, but it looks like I won't be able to this time. "I guess I'll be 'Prince Charming'.

Lolidragon glared at me. "Way too tasteless. Absolutely no way."

"Then *you* try coming up with a name." I rolled my eyes; just who was the one playing anyway?

"We'll just get rid of the Charming and call you Prince! Okay, that's it for the name."

Seeing the word "Prince" already floating above the male "me", I was rendered speechless yet again.

⁸ **PM:** This stands for "Private Message" in MMOs; "PMing" someone would mean sending them a message over the private message channel.

"Which continent do you want to be born in? There's the East, West, North, South and Central continents." Lolidragon said, beaming at me.

"Any one is fine..."

"Alright then, you're ready to be born." As she finished her sentence, the young man in front of me suddenly lunged towards me. As soon as we merged together, I felt myself falling...

"Hey, wait a sec! Don't we have to distribute my skill points?" I shouted.

"You obviously haven't visited our official website. Skill points are randomly distributed. Also, remember to PM me, you hottie! If you PM me, I'll reward you!"

Faint

After landing at long last, I took a deep breath and instantly remembered the most urgent mission at hand – *Mirror, where's a mirror?* I needed to check and see if I really was that good-looking.

"A hottie, he's *so* gorgeous!" Hearing that, I turned to look, only to see a girl – with eyes that had turned into hearts – looking my way. Reflexively I looked left and right, thinking, *Where? Where's the hottie? I want to check him out too!*

Just as I was peering to my left and right, however, someone suddenly grabbed my hand. *Who's this rude bugger? Doesn't he know that it's forbidden for somebody to grab a girl's hand whenever he pleases?* I turned, glaring daggers at whoever was looking for death... *Whoops, it's a really cute girl. My bad, I nearly mistook her for a pervert!*

"Um, I've only just started to play this game. Could you guide me?" She fixed a hopeful gaze on me.

"I'm also a first-timer, so I'm afraid I wouldn't be of much help." *The game has only been "live" for slightly over two hours, so how could there be anyone able to guide you? This girl's meal-ticket-fishing skill still isn't quite up to par. Right now, she should be leveling up; to get a good husband, you must look cute, level up, and sweet-talk like a champion, wahahaha!*

(Feng Wu Qing: Believe me, all men in this world should stay away from my sis. She won't even spit your bones out when you're swallowed whole!)

"Then let's go train together," said the girl, trying to look as helpless as possible.

"I want to train together too!"

"Me too!"

Wh-What is with this scene?! I looked at the horde of women. They all had a predatory gleam in their eyes, gazing at me as though they were hungry wolves looking at a piece of meat. At last I understood how a steak must feel – Calm down, calm down! Women will want to maintain appearances; they definitely won't be like ravenous wolves lunging for a steak. Anyway, seeing how things are, I won't need to look for a mirror anymore. I already know I must be very good-looking.

Taking a deep breath, I told myself, *I'm a guy now (Feng Wu Qing: You're a tranny...). I must behave like a guy, although I really don't know how a guy would react at being looked at by a horde of women as though he were a piece of meat.*

Just then, I remembered my name – Prince. *Since I'm called "Prince", I should conduct myself like a gentleman, for fear of tarnishing my name and appearance...* And so, putting on my most dazzling smile and using the gentlest, warmest tone possible, I said, "My apologies, ladies, but I've only just begun to play as well. I was just thinking of going to cut up some of the lowest-level monsters, like slimes..."

"My god, he's so hot!" As delighted squeals filled the air, there was a sudden movement and a girl rushed towards her steak – no, towards me – and sparked a chain reaction. Good god, when there's dozens of girls rushing towards you! What would a guy usually do? I don't know, but I... I want to RUN!

"He-e-elp!" I cried as I turned on my heel and ran.

Nearly an hour later, I found myself hiding in a tiny convenience shop. Terrified, I peeked carefully out the door, only to see the tiny newbie village now crowded with tons of girls searching for me. Why were there so many girls? I'd realized the answer even as I was dashing all over the village earlier: This was an elven newbie village, and girls were far more likely than guys to choose to play as an elf.

"May I ask what the customer is looking for?" A voice suddenly rang out from behind me.

I glanced back. *Good god, a woman!* I was scared to the point of plastering myself against the wall, yet the woman in front of me merely regarded me with curiosity, her face devoid of the faintest trace of adoration. According to what I had observed earlier, ten out of ten women would be attracted to me, so the one standing before me could only be an NPC. I breathed a sigh of relief. *Looks like there's nothing to be worried about!*

I glanced at my surroundings and realized that this was in fact a pharmacy. *No wonder there's nobody in here; there's probably nobody who would need to buy health potions yet, right? Hmm, it's been three hours, but I still haven't started training. My brother will*

probably laugh at me when I log off later... Seriously irked, I decided to get started with my training...but first, I would need to find out where to train.

"Miss, could you tell me where the best place to train is?"

Hearing that, the female NPC realized that I wasn't a customer. Her face darkened and she answered with evident boredom, "Right outside the entrance of the elven village you'll find man-eating slimes and green gnomes to fight. You won't be able to handle anything tougher."

Seeing that "don't bother me" expression on her face, I felt the urge to turn away and just walk out, but I thought, *It would be wiser not to simply step out of this shop, not with those girls prowling around outside.* I had no choice but to will my face into a friendly expression and smile politely.

"Then may I ask if you know how to summon the system menu?" I wanted to look at my stats.

"Just say 'system.' Aren't you able to figure out something *that* obvious...?"

You damn NPC, I thought, silently cursing her parents (*The game designers?*), but my expression didn't waver and I continued to smile politely. "Thank you very much." Then I said, "System," and my basic stats immediately became visible to my left eye.

<Name: Prince | Gender: Male>

<Level: 1 | Race: Elf | Class: None | Reputation: 0 | Health: 60 | Mana: 20 | Unspent skill points: 0 | Strength: 10>

... An elf with a strength of 10? Looks like even the heavens want me to be a warrior, and a violent one at that.

<Physique: 6 | Agility: 9 | Intelligence: 6 | Willpower: 4 | Wisdom: 5 | Charisma: 10>

... My charisma sure is high, does it have anything to do with my looks? I suspect so...

<Luck: Unknown | Abilities: None>

I breathed a sigh of relief. Since the upper limit of each skill was ten, it looked like my stats were pretty good, especially for a would-be warrior.

I opened my pouch. Usually newbies were provided with some basic equipment. As expected, there was a pair of pants (defense +2) and a shirt (defense +1), as well as a small

knife with an attack power of 1... *It really is a small knife, with a blade no longer than fifteen centimeters.*

"Hey, if you're not buying anything then get out; you're blocking the way in."

Grr, what a rude NPC! I resisted the urge to swear at her ancestors. *Hmph, a good woman doesn't quarrel with an NPC.* Thus, I retained my ladylike appearance – *Wrong! I mean, gentlemanly appearance.* With the corners of my mouth still turned up thirty degrees, I said as warmly as possible, "Thank you for your guidance."

<System notice: Prince has learned a new ability – Thick Skin>

I nearly fell over from shock upon seeing that. What sort of strange technique was this?! I hurriedly looked at the explanation.

<Thick Skin: Ability Level 1, Charisma +5%>

I found myself wanting to faint. *Forget it, I thought. I'll just go and level up first, otherwise my brother will laugh himself to death.*

I snuck along the edge of the village and, not daring to leave via the main gate, stepped over the newbie village's fence, which was so low as to be practically nonexistent. As soon as I was free, I rushed towards the hills beyond the village.

Man-eating slimes, here I co-o-ome! The first thing I saw were dozens of man-eating slimes dotting the landscape. *It's a good thing they won't aggro,⁹ otherwise I'd have died of shock when they came charging over,* I thought. Looking at the small knife in my hand, I realized that I seemed to have absolutely no experience whatsoever with melee combat. I stealthily circled behind a slime, raised my knife, and stabbed with as much force as I could muster.

<Attack successful, Man-eating Slime HP -5>

Yaaaay! Attack successful! Oh god, I feel so touched, I really am a pro at this. It looks like I really have the potential to be a warrior! In my head I saw myself wearing a white cape, a white sacred sword in my other hand, with one foot resting atop my brother's inert form.

Wahahaha— Ouch! Abruptly something bit my hand, causing me to cry out in pain and surprise.

⁹ **Aggro:** In most RPGs, mobs (monsters) generally attack players on sight or when they enter a certain range (unless the players grossly out-level the mobs); "to aggro" refers as such to the (often unintentional) act of drawing close enough to a mob to trigger an attack. However, to prevent newbies from being overwhelmed when starting out, most early-game mobs (in Prince's case, the man-eating slimes) do not attack players unless they are first attacked.

<Man-eating Slime attack successful, Prince HP -3>

As the pain drove me to tears, I raised my hand and looked. *God, so much saliva; it's disgusting! You damn slime, not only did you bite me, but you even dared to drool on a pure young woman's hand! I... I'm royally pissed off!* Ignoring the knife in my hand, I raised my foot and began to stomp on it with all my might. *Stomp! Stomp! Stomp, stomp, stomp!*

"Who asked you to drool?! Actually daring to slobber all over my hand... You must be sick of life!" I said viciously even as I stepped on the slime again and again.

<Attack successful, Man-eating Slime HP -3>

<Critical hit successful, Man-eating Slime HP -10>

<Man-eating Slime has died, Prince's experience has increased to 10/20, Prince has learned a new ability – Buddha's Mountain's Phantom Kick...>

Having yet to vent all my anger, I did not bother to look at the information on my new technique. Instead, gazing at the Man-eating slimes dotting the landscape with my knife in hand, I smiled darkly. *Damn slimes, I'll demonstrate the food preparation skills that leave even my mom awed! Man-eating slimes? Wahaha, no, in my eyes you are no longer monsters, just a pile of carrots!*

I sliced and sliced and—

<Attack successful... Attack successful... Attack successful>

<Prince has reached Level 2... 3... 4... 5...>

<Prince has learned a new ability: Chop>

Shouldn't it be "Slice"...? Hmm, well, if you exaggerate the slicing motion, I guess it does become "Chop"!

<Prince has learned a new ability: Continuous Attack>

Continuous Attack? Whoa... It's probably because I sliced up these "vegetables" really quickly!

"Wahaha, now you know the taste of fear! We'll see if you still dare to slobber on me!" I yelled, even as I chased after the slimes.

<Prince has learned a new ability: Terrifying Roar>

Whew, I'm bushed! Finally somewhat tired from all that slicing, I sat down on the ground. As I surveyed the desolated, slime-free hill, it suddenly struck me.

Could I possibly be...inclined towards violence? Oh well, forget it; after all I'm a guy now. (Feng Wu Qing: You're a tranny!)

Just then, I glanced back and discovered that the ground was littered with loot and hurriedly began to pick it all up. *Don't even joke about not picking it up! All this stuff can be sold for a lovely bit of money!* Looking through the loot, I saw that most of it was junk, but it was still decent for a newbie like me. I swapped my knife for one with attack power +3, put on a pair of sandals (defense +1), wrist guards (attack power +5%), a cap (defense +1), changed into a pair of long pants with +3 defense (the type that elves wear, such as Legolas in Lord of the Rings) and slipped on two rings with +1 magical resistance each.

I'd also looted over a hundred coppers. From what I heard, even the lousiest food here – *mantous*¹⁰ – cost five coppers each... *These man-eating slimes sure are poor.*

Sweating profusely and enjoying the cool breeze, I realized that I'd started to like the feeling of being a warrior. *It feels sooo good.* I also finally appreciated the good points of having a realism level of 99%, since even the sunset looked incredibly beautiful. However, a realism level of 99% had its shortcomings as well... Such as my growling stomach. I could only take the two *mantous* out of the newbie pack and, as I ate, I wondered if the man-eating slimes could possibly be tasty...

I activated the system menu, wanting to see just what the fruits of my labor had been.

<Name: Prince | Gender: Male>

<Level: 8 | Race: Elf | Class: None | Reputation: 0 | Health: 140 | Mana: 45 | Unspent skill points: 21 | Strength: 10 | Physique: 6 | Agility: 9 | Intelligence: 6 | Willpower: 4 | Wisdom: 5 | Charisma: 10 | Luck: Unknown | Abilities: Thick Skin – Ability Level 1, Charisma +5% / Buddha's Mountain's Phantom Kick – Ability Level 1, 10% chance of tripling attack power when using leg attacks (multiplier does not include weapon(s)' attack power) / Chop – Ability Level 3, attack power +10% when using Chop / Continuous Attack – Ability Level 3, can attack continuously for up to 4 times / Terrifying Roar – Ability Level 1, reduces enemy defense by 3%>

After some thought, I assigned my skill points, and so it became...

<Name: Prince | Gender: Male>

¹⁰ **Mantou:** A Chinese bun without any fillings.

<Level: 8 | Race: Elf | Class: None | Reputation: 0 | Health: 180 | Mana: 45 | Unspent skill points: 0 | Strength: 20 | Physique: 10 | Agility: 16 | Intelligence: 6 | Willpower: 4 | Wisdom: 5 | Charisma: 10 | Luck: Unknown>

Hehehe, I'm going to be an elf warrior with lots of strength and agility. Even though I had made up my mind not to be scared of the pain, it was still best to avoid getting hit, if possible. *Two more levels until I can select my class,* I thought. Looking at the newly spawned slimes, a faint smile crept onto my lips.

Before long... Hehe, I've reached level ten! Now that I was finally able to select my class, I felt indescribably happy; being able to select my class with my own efforts really felt great. *Not bad. With such a good start, it won't be long before I'll be able to defeat that idiot brother of mine.*

Humming a song even as I entered the newbie elven village through the main gate, I was about to ask around for information on choosing a class when I discovered that I had made a *huge* mistake... I'd entered the newbie village through the *main gate!* *Oh god...!* I found myself identifying with the feelings of a steak once again, seeing the dozens of starving wolves in front of me...

Escaping once more into the pharmacy, I thought sorrowfully, *If the amount of time I spend being a steak could be spent on fighting mobs, I would probably be one of the top players by now...*

“What *are* you doing?” a guy’s voice came from behind me. Since at the moment I was crouched down next to the door, peering out at the situation in the streets, I couldn’t see him.

“Heeheehee! This guy’s hilarious,” a girl’s sweet voice said... *A girl? Waaah! I don't want to turn around!*

“May I ask what medicine are you looking for?” This voice belonged to that very XX NPC. *Looks like I can't hide anymore...* Thus, with my head held low – almost level with the ground – I turned slowly to face the NPC. “Could you tell me where to go in order to change my class?”

“Why is it you again? This is a pharmacy, not a newbie directory.” *What the hell is up with you,* I thought, swearing silently in my head. *Just you wait; when my level's higher, I'll definitely come back and kill you once, you damn NPC!*

“You want to change your class?” that girl’s sweet voice rang out again. “What class are you planning on choosing? Perhaps we can help you!”

"Oh... I want to become a warrior." With my head still lowered, I stole a glance around at the floor. Minus the NPC, there were a total of eight legs, so that would be four people, probably three guys and a girl.

"Weird person..." another guy muttered.

The girl simply smiled, seeming mildly amused. "Are you feeling shy? Why are you hanging your head so low?"

And just how was I supposed to explain? *Sigh... I'd better ask where I should go to change my class, and then hurry up and flee— Err no, I mean, hurry up and change my class.* "Could you tell me where I should go if I want to become a warrior, please?"

"To become a warrior, you'll have to go to the south side of the main square and find the NPC who is carrying a sword and wearing a soldier's uniform," the first guy said kindly. "He'll ask you to kill ten wolves, so you should bring along some health potions or you'll have to rest after fighting just one wolf."

"Thanks..." I said before hurriedly purchasing ten minor health potions from that XX NPC. *Waaah! There goes my hundred coppers,* I thought as I was handed my health potions and stuffed them into my pouch. I was just about to escape when one of the other players spoke up again.

"Do you know where to find the wolves?" the girl asked, sounding concerned. Without waiting for my reply, she continued, "We were just about to go train on wolves anyway; why don't you come with us? You should go pick up the quest first. We'll wait for you at the western side gate. Don't take too long!"

I'm touched... She really is a good person, I thought, nodding enthusiastically. "Right."

I walked openly to the main square, found the uniform-wearing NPC, and accepted the warrior quest... Huh? You're asking me how I dared to walk openly to the main square? Why I wasn't afraid of turning into a steak? Wahaha! That's because when I went to the armorer to sell my pile of trash loot, I discovered that they actually sold masks – in particular, masquerade masks, the type that covers the upper half of your face. It even offered +1 defense! Scared of being pursued again, I had bought one without hesitation. *Thank heavens! I can finally move freely now!*

Walking to the western gate, I saw from afar that there were three guys and a girl waiting there, and so I hurried over. "Sorry for the wait."

"It's okay, let's introduce ourselves. I'm Snow White Rose; you can just call me Rose. I'm a mage," said Rose in an amused tone.

Composing myself, I took a good look at her... A beauty! An extraordinary beauty! I myself was something of a beauty, but even I couldn't deny that her face was prettier, her boobs bigger, her waist slenderer, her legs longer, and her skin fairer... *Waaah! I feel like drawing circles in a corner...*

Never mind, Feng Lan; you are now a guy (Feng Wu Qing: How many times are you going to make me say it: You are a TRANNY!), so it's meaningless to compete with a girl.

"Legolas, archer," said the skinniest of the guys.

"I'm The Strongest Elf. You can just call me Li'l Strong." *Are you a cockroach?* I thought.¹¹ "I'm a warrior; warrior's a good class!" said The Strongest Elf, his expression open and honest.

"I'm For Healing Only, a priest," said a pretty boy in a cultured voice.

"I'm Prince, no class yet..." I replied in a small voice.

Rose looked thoughtfully at my mask. I gulped nervously under her stare. "Prince, why do you want to wear a mask?"

"A ma-mask provides extra armor, doesn't it?" I said, pretending to be confused. *Heh heh! Pretending to be naive is one of my talents...* "That's why I bought one."

"I think he's just trying to look cool," said Legolas, unimpressed.

Upon hearing that, I kept my face blank and smiled vaguely. However, in my head I was thinking, *I'm already cool enough as it is, why on earth would I need to try and look even cooler?*

"All right, now that we've reached the wolves' riverbank: Healing, buff¹² Prince up! We'll help him finish those ten wolves off quickly so he can go and change his class," said Rose kindly. *God, I'm so touched, waaah...! Rose, I want to be sisters with you.* (Feng Wu Qing: ... Turning into a woman? Again?)

As the pretty boy finished chanting a prayer verse, I felt my defense increase and said sincerely, "Thanks."

"You're welcome. Go ahead and fight!" the pretty boy replied politely.

¹¹ **Li'l Strong:** In Chinese, this nickname is written as “小强” (prn. xiao qiang) – which is also a colloquial way of referring to cockroaches.

¹² **Buff:** A skill or spell that boosts a character's stats or has beneficial effects on the character(s) and usually lasts for some time. To “buff up” means for characters to use such skills and spells on themselves and party members, often in preparation for some major fighting.

I locked my attention on a solitary wolf and crept closer, still facing it... *Waaah!* The wolf was really big and kind of scary. It had fixed its blood-red gaze on me and its lips were curled back, revealing razor-sharp fangs. But most terrifying of all, it was *drooling*...

I'm so screwed, I thought, my brain going numb. I'd much rather be slicing up slimes – after all, they look kind of like frozen fruits – but wolves... I've never even used a kitchen knife to prepare something that's still alive, what should I do now? Aaaaah!

The wolf lunged over and with it came that mouth filled with saliva and razor-sharp teeth.

Nooooo! I spun around...and ran!

"Prince, what are you doing? Hurry and turn around and fight. Don't worry, For Healing Only's pretty skilled, he'll heal you," Rose shouted.

That's not the problem, I yelled back in my heart, I – I don't want – I don't want to be bitten by that terrifying and disgusting wolf's mouth!

"What on earth is he doing..." questioned Legolas, his expression cold.

"That... I have no idea either!" Li'l Strong replied, clearly astonished as he watched me flee at top speed. "But his agility is pretty high, to actually let him to outrun a wolf when he's only level ten."

"Aaaaah..." Running too fast, I carelessly tripped on a stone and fell. *That damnable 99% realism level...* As the thought flashed across my mind, the wolf came lunging over and viciously bit down on my left hand.

<System notice: Prince HP -30>

Owww! Waaah! So, so much saliva, it's disgusting! Next, the wolf suddenly opened its maw and it was about to bite off my head when its drool actually... It actually *dripped* on my face...

UNFORGIVABLE!

Twak! It sounded like a nerve had snapped in my brain – a nerve called *reason*.

I'm pissed! I'm pissed! I'm REALLY pissed! Just then, I recollect that whenever my mom killed a chicken, she would always reach for the neck, and then... *Heh heh heh!*

"Prince, hurry up and run! If you take this attack, you'll definitely die!" Rose and the others had turned pale and were already frantically running towards me. Unfortunately, they were simply too far away.

Without hesitation, I gripped my knife tightly and swung it from right to left with all my strength, brutally slicing through the top half of the wolf's skull, separating its brains from its skull.

<System notice: Critical hit, Wolf has died, Prince's experience has increased to 100/2000, Prince has received quest item: Wolf Fang x1>

Trapped beneath the wolf's body, I was thoroughly stained with the wolf's blood... Warm blood – with its coppery smell – was flowing everywhere, staining my clothes and drying on my skin.

How terrifying! Fighting back the tears, my mind was filled with only those two words.

Question: what do you think will happen when a person is terrified to the extreme? Answer: *Their reason will disappear!*

I slowly got to my feet and, grasping my knife tightly, looked straight at the wolves all over the riverbank.

Don't be scared, I thought, *They're not that different from chickens, ducks, fish or any other type of meat, so they shouldn't be too hard for someone with my culinary experience to handle. Come on then! It's time to start cooking...* With a fierce glint in my eyes, I darted towards the closest wolf.

Just as I was wondering how to take it down, I thought of my *Buddha's Mountain's Phantom Kick* and *Continuous Attack*, as well as that PS13 fighting game that I had been playing with my brother recently. *Combine these three things together and what do you get?*

Aiming at the wolf's throat, I remembered, *kick upwards, and then kick from the side. Next, a spin kick, and finally kick it back to the ground with my heel.* Odd, why did I suddenly feel kind of like Chun Li...?¹³

<System notice: Buddha's Mountain's Phantom Kick execution successful>

<Continuous Attack execution successful>

<Wolf HP -30>

Still not dead? I raised my knife and, gripping it with both hands, drove it into the skull of the dying wolf.

¹³ **Chun Li:** Famous female character from the fighting game series, Street Fighter. She wears an outfit that vaguely looks like a cheong sam (or *qi pao*) and ties her hair up in two buns. She's weak as hell at hand combat, but her leg attacks (or kicks) are quite strong, and her signature move is the Lightning Kick. She's also the first female playable character in a fighting game (so girls often picked her when playing Street Fighters).

<Wolf has died, Prince's experience has increased to 200/2000, Prince has received quest item: Wolf Fang x1>

<Abilities: Buddha's Mountain's Phantom Kick ability level up – Ability Level 2, 10% chance of tripling attack power when using leg attacks (multiplier does not include weapon(s)' attack power), attack power +20 / Continuous Attack ability level up – Ability Level 4, can attack continuously up to 5 times>

"My god, with just his leg..." Li'l Strong looked at me with astonishment again, worship evident in his eyes.

"Unbelievable..." Legolas muttered with an odd twist to his lips.

"Why does it remind me of the moves used by a particular character from a fighting game..." Pretty boy, that is, For Healing Only, said with a knowing smile.

"So cool..." murmured Rose and a chill ran down my spine even as she spoke.

All that kicking had worn me out, but just then I thought of the method I usually use to prepare fish: All I needed to do was simply slice their bellies open and all their innards would come slithering out. With that in mind, I smiled faintly and headed for the next wolf.

Just like before, I kicked upwards, lifting the wolf into the air and, with a swift upward stroke, drew an arc in the air with the knife. As I watched, the ground became stained with red and white matter, and I found myself wondering, *Might wolves' intestines be tastier than pigs' intestines?*¹⁴ Still wondering, I stalked towards the next wolf.

(Later, when I looked back on my combat history, I couldn't help but be awed. *Second Life*, this game with its realism level of 99%, made it possible for anyone – with enough speed and precision – to finish off their opponent without spilling even a drop of their own blood. This had a huge bearing on my fighting style later on.)

By this point, Rose no longer dared to look. As a matter of fact, she'd covered her eyes after seeing me gut my first wolf. As for the others, their faces were pale as sheets as they watched me prepare the food – uh, no, I mean, kill the mobs.

(Feng Wu Qing: The moral of the lesson is, one should never, ever cross a woman, especially one who has lots of experience in the kitchen, or you might share the same fate as those unsuspecting vegetables...)

¹⁴ **Pigs' intestines:** Grossed out? Don't be. Pigs' intestines are a pretty popular Chinese dish – what they do, of course, is remove all the icky stuff (obviously) and then braise it (like braised duck), often with lots of dark soy sauce, together with slices of pork, bean curd (tofu), sliced pig's stomach, pig's liver, and in some cases, pig's skin... Sounds really gross, but you'll understand if you ever get to eat it.



<Ding! System notice: Prince has reached level 11!>

I leveled up? So quickly? I took a look at the contents of my pouch and saw that I had already gotten ten wolf fangs. *Wahaha, I can finally change class, joy!* I walked back towards Rose and company cheerfully.

Whew, cooking really is a tiring chore! I'm so tired that even my steps feel sluggish. And so I shouted to Rose from afar, “Rose, I’m done with the quest.”

Rose slowly lowered her hands from her eyes. She stared, tongue-tied, at the bodies strewn everywhere, the river filled with bloody water, the floor littered with red and white matter, and the blood-soaked elf before her – me – holding a knife in his right hand and slowly walking towards them.

“Blood...Elf!” Rose half-shouted in a strangled voice.

In the days to come, when my name became famous, I would receive numerous nicknames, but only two would ever be widely-known. They were *Ultra-Gorgeous Prince* and... *Blood Elf*.

After bidding farewell to Rose and company, I ventured back to the village on my own to change my class. Once I entered the village, I rushed to find the warrior class’s NPC. “Uncle, I’ve collected ten wolf fangs already, can you change my class now?”

“That’s quick! As they say, *Yangtze swells with each new wave, shore becomes the waves’ mass grave...*¹⁵ Seeing Uncle was about to start yet another long-winded discussion, I hurriedly headed him off.

“Yes, yes, yes, you’re right as usual, but could you first help little me change class?”

“All right, all right! Young people these days...” Mumbling non-stop, the NPC uncle took the wolf fangs from me.

All of a sudden, a white light enveloped me and I heard the system’s voice speaking.

<Ding! System notice: Prince’s class has been successfully changed to Warrior.>

I hurriedly called out, “System.”

¹⁵ **Yangtze swells with each new wave, shore becomes the waves’ mass grave:** In Chinese, this is “长江后浪推前浪，前浪死在沙滩上” (prn. cháng jiāng hòu làng tuī qián làng, qián làng sǐ zài shā tān shàng) and when translated more literally, means “On the Yangtze, the waves behind pushes on the waves in front, so the wave in front dies on the shore”. The proverb basically means that the generation will take over and surpass their predecessors. Note that this is not the real version of the proverb in this version used here by the author, the second half of the proverb has been changed to give it a slightly more comical and irreverent tone.

<Name: Prince | Gender: Male>

<Level: 11 | Race: Elf | Class: Warrior | Reputation: 0 | Health: 450 | Mana: 100 | Unspent skill points: 0 | Strength: 25 | Physique: 12 | Agility: 21 | Intelligence: 6 | Willpower: 4 | Wisdom: 5 | Charisma: 10 | Luck: Unknown>

“Little fellow, as the rule goes, you get a free weapon and three free abilities!” The NPC uncle proceeded to elaborate. “For your weapon, you get to choose from daggers, dao,¹⁶ rapiers, broadswords, axes, etc. Fate alone will decide whether you get something good or something lousy.

“There are a total of ten abilities you can choose from. Passive skills include Continuous Attack, Increased Strength, Reinforced Defense, Liteness, and Life Extension while offensive abilities include Heavy Blow (for two-handed weapons only, will use up 20 mana), Inferno Slash (for one-handed weapons only, will use up 20 mana), Fatal Blow (for small weapons only, will use up 20 mana), Blazing Determination (will use up 80 mana, attack power +100%, lasts 20 minutes) and Impenetrable Wall (will use up 80 mana, defense +100%, lasts 20 minutes).”

“Weapon... A chopping knife?” I mused.

“Huh?” The NPC uncle looked puzzled.

“Uh, dao.” Even though I felt more comfortable with a chopping knife...for the sake of my beautiful image, I decided to forego my own preference and picked a dao instead.

“A dao-wielding elf sure is a rare sight. There you go; it’s already in your inventory.”

Hearing that, I hurriedly opened my pouch, and slowly drew out a black dao. Why did I call it a black dao? Was it because both the handle and the sheath were black? No, actually the main reason was because written there on the sheath in gold lettering were two words: Black Dao.

I thought of the swordsmen of bygone days who would, at such a moment, slowly draw out the sword and then raise the sword high. Under the light of the sun, the gleaming blade would reflect the brilliant sunlight. *How cool!* With that thought, I too, slowly drew the dao, but as I drew out the blade, I suddenly discovered that this dao was...*unbelievably*...black. Even the blade was black!

¹⁶ **Dao:** A type of sword that features predominantly in Chinese culture. They are single-edged and may have fairly broad blades, thus resembling chopping knives at times (so you can guess just why Prince picked this weapon). Although they occasionally resemble sabres, their hilts are quite different (among other things). For a manga example of a dao, please refer to Ling Yao’s weapon in *Fullmetal Alchemist*. For more information on the dao, check out Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dao_\(sword\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dao_(sword)).

*God **** it, how the hell am I supposed to reflect back the light of the sun with this? GAAAH, That totally ruined my chance to act cool, damn it! I stowed the dao away, ticked off.*

"Hey, little fellow, have you decided which abilities you want?"

"Wait, wait, let me think!" I want to learn Increased Strength, Liteness, Life Extension, and Inferno Slash, but I can only pick three! What a quandary, I thought, furrowing my eyebrows. "I guess I'll take Increased Strength, Liteness, and Inferno Slash." After all, I hadn't missed once when I was fighting wolves with Rose and company. With the speed that I'm taking down mobs right now, my HP ought to be sufficient for the time being.

<Ding! System notice: Prince learns 3 new abilities – Increased Strength; Ability Level 1, Strength +5% / Liteness; Ability Level 1, Agility +5% / Inferno Slash; Ability Level 1>

<System notice: Game has received external interference; requesting player confirmation to log off>

What's going on? I wondered. I'd better log off and see what the ruckus is about.

The instant I removed the game helmet, I heard my brother roaring thunderously. "GAAAH! Sis, when on Earth are you going to start cooking? It's already 9PM. Do you want me to starve to death!?"

I should explain here that, at the time, it was summer break. My parents had gone abroad for yet another holiday, leaving my brother and I to fend for ourselves. *Also, if the question were to arise, I would much rather eat a man-eating slime than something prepared by my brother – and I'm sure he feels the same.* So the chore of cooking three meals a day fell largely on me.

"Fine, I'll go and cook noodles!"

Twenty minutes later, I sat across from my brother and, as we ate our noodles, we began discussing the game.

"Sis, I'm already level fifteen! What level are you?" *You damn Yang Ming, only daring to provoke me after getting your noodles...*

Reluctantly, I replied, "I'm level eleven! But I've been training on my own..."

He laughed. "As I said, it's impossible for you to level up faster than me!"

"Che, if not for the fact that I'm too handsome, you wouldn't have been able to train faster than me!"

“Huh? Too handsome? What are you talking about?” My brother looked confused.

Then, I told him the entire story...and got scolded, again. *Waaah!*

“Are you an idiot? You had one wish and, just like that, you used it to change your gender? Honestly, you could have wished for a godly weapon, or a godly pet, or for more skill points, but *nooo*, you went and used it to become a tranny!” my brother fumed, his expression both mournful and incensed.

“Hey, you should look at it this way: sooner or later someone will have a godly weapon or own a godly pet, and anyone can get more skill points so long as they level up, but there’ll never be another tranny aside from me!” I answered with a laugh.

“*...Sigh*, I can’t be bothered with you.” My brother’s face was still the picture of sorrow. *I bet that he’s wishing that he was the one who received that wish...*

“What’s your nick? I’ll PM you tomorrow when I log on.”

“Not telling.”

“Why not?”

“Because you’ll use it to blackmail me... Like for instance, if I refuse to cook for you, you’ll probably threaten to reveal my identity as a transvestite, so on and so forth.” *I know you too well, Bro.*

“How did you guess— Ah, no, how could you possibly distrust your own brother so?!”

Stupid brother, putting on that sad expression, che! You might be able to deceive those naïve little girls into falling for you, but trying to trick the sister who has known you for nineteen years? Forget it!

“Hmph!”

“Fine! Forget I asked then.” Feng Yang Ming thumbed his nose at me; looked like his plan to blackmail me had failed.

“Wash the bowls once you’re done, or else you won’t get to eat breakfast tomorrow!”

“You’re going to play *Second Life*? ”

“No, I’m going to play ‘King of Fighters 100’ on your PS13.” *I’m going to properly research, so as to develop more moves and become a genuine Chun Li.*

My brother stared at me in disbelief. He watched as I really took out the PS13 and started playing, muttering, “Odd... When did Sis start to like fighting games? In the past it was only because I couldn’t find anyone else to play with me, so she was forced to play as well.”

After experimenting for over two hours as “Chun Li”, I confidently returned to *Second Life*, planning to begin leveling up like mad. *Heh heh, just you wait, you stupid brother. I'll out-level you soon and we'll see if you still dare to laugh at me! Time to go and cook some wolves – ah, no, kill some wolves, I mean...*

However, just as I was about to pass through the western gate, I was suddenly given a solid cuff on the head and began to see stars.

<System notice: Prince has been successfully attacked by player Lolidragon, Prince HP -5>

Huh? Lolidragon... Bloody hell, the GM is assaulting people! I want to complain! Unfortunately, before I could so much as speak, Lolidragon had begun to berate me loudly.

“I told you to PM me, but nooo, you just had to forget to, finally forcing me to search all over for you – and why are you even wearing that silly mask? If not for the fact that we argued for two hours, deciding your height and hairstyle, I would never have been able to recognize you!”

I turned around to look at Lolidragon, only to see an ultra-beauty wearing the newbie outfit and looking not at all like a GM. I found myself wondering, *Why do the GMs look so ordinary in this game? If they look like this, then how are we supposed to distinguish the GMs from the players?*

“Lolidragon, why are you dressed like this? Aren’t you a G—” Without waiting for me to finish my sentence, Lolidragon hurriedly covered my mouth and hauled me to the nearby woods. *My god, what are you trying to do!?*

“Shh! Are you trying to tell the world that I’m a GM?” Lolidragon fumed.

A GM who’s afraid of being recognized as a GM? What sort of situation is this? My head was nearly bursting with questions.

“Listen up. I’m actually a hidden GM!” Lolidragon, knowing that I hadn’t so much as looked at the official website, began to explain in detail.

“A hidden GM is generally no different from a regular player, except that we have an important task: We are to report any shortcomings in the game – player complaints, bugs etc. – during the course of our gameplay. Moreover, because we’re mingling with ordinary players, we can find stuff out that’s not easily discovered by regular GMs.”

“But wouldn’t that be extremely unfair?” I protested. *In that case, wouldn’t all the top players be hidden GMs?*

“As if. We may be hidden GMs, but the company doesn’t offer us any special privileges, so we’re just like normal players.” Lolidragon swatted my head again.

“Oh...” I get it. That is to say, Lolidragon is no different from a normal player, hahaha. Then I won’t have to be afraid of pissing her off, heh heh heh!

“Did you have some business with me, then?”

Lolidragon’s tone suddenly became coquettish. “Of course – it’s to ask a total hottie like you to go train with me!” Sidling towards me as she spoke, she even went so far as to lightly draw circles on my chest.

Waaah, I’m getting sexually harassed by a GM! I quickly retreated a few steps and hid behind a tree.

Lolidragon snickered. “All right, all right. Seeing how traumatized you are, I’d guess that you’re terrified after being chased by girls...to the point of wearing a mask!”

Hearing that, my head sagged forward and I began to tearfully pour out the entire sob story of my disastrous steak encounter. Lolidragon merely laughed heartlessly from the start to the end. *What sort of attitude is that?* I thought bitterly.

Seeing how distressed I was, however, Lolidragon quickly said, “Don’t worry. Now that I’m around, I’ll help defend you against those crazed butterflies and protect your virtue!”

...Then why do I feel that being with you endangers my virtue more than anything else?

“Moreover, even though I may not have any special authority, I’m su-u-per familiar with this game. You can direct any questions to me!” Lolidragon said with a sly expression.

I rolled my eyes. After all, it wasn’t like I could do anything to get rid of her. “Alright, let’s go train together then.”

“Yaaay!” Lolidragon cheered. *Is there something to be this happy about?* I wondered.

“Let’s go! Let’s go!” Lolidragon exclaimed. She grabbed my arm and began to drag me along.

“Just walk, don’t grab my arm!” My face had paled.

“H-hey! Don’t draw circles on my chest with your finger!”

“Ah! Stop blowing into my ear!”

“If you touch my butt again, I’ll kill you!”

Waaah! My virtue is in mortal peril! Will somebody please come and save me from the clutches of this female pervert!?

• Chapter 2 •

Legend, Begin

“Hey, Lolidragon, what’s your class?” I asked as I removed her hands from my butt for the umpteenth time. “Mage? Priest?”

Lolidragon cackled. *Or perhaps she’s a witch!*

“How could I *possibly* pick such dull jobs? I chose the class with the brightest future in the game!”

That piqued my curiosity. “Which is...?”

Covering her mouth with the back of her hand, she cackled again, “Wohohohohohooo! Do I even need to say it? I’m obviously... A thief!”

“True, that seems to have quite a “bright” future,¹⁷ but we only have a warrior and a thief in our party. That’s hardly ideal.”

“Relax! Just wait and I’ll teach you the *real* way to fight – no sweat, blood, or money required,” she replied confidently.

¹⁷ **Brightest future/“bright” future:** This was originally meant to be a pun. What Lolidragon says is actually, “有前途” (yǒu qián tú), meaning “has a bright future”, while Prince replies with, “有钱途” (yǒu qián tú), meaning “a lucrative future”, which sounds identical to the earlier phrase. The first “qián” is the Chinese character for “front” or “forward”, while the latter “qián” is the character for “money”.

The trip to the Wolves' Riverbank was supposed to take only fifteen minutes, but in the end it took the two of us an hour to get there. Obviously, Lolidragon was the reason for the delay. Under the pretext that no one else was around, she forced me to take off my mask and her eyes immediately turned into two hearts.

Lolidragon handed me a mirror after she had looked her fill, and I ended up staring at myself with heart-shaped eyes, just like her.

Waaah! Why?! Why?! Why am I so incredibly good-looking? My god!

In my entire life, I have only seen two guys so hot that I couldn't help but sigh over them. The first was that little brother of mine (*even I have to admit that he really is very good-looking, even if his personality is the worst*). The second was myself.

Oh god, don't tell me I can only choose between incest and narcissism?! Sighing, I returned the mirror to Lolidragon. Off to training we go!

Just as I was about to walk over to the nearest wolf and vent my feelings of frustration, however, Lolidragon stopped me with a shout. "Stay there and watch how I deal with the wolf! Observe." She took out a dagger and approached her prey.

"*Second Life* is truly a realistic game; the damage dealt varies depending on which part of the mob you attack. That's why we should find a mob's weak points before attacking," she explained as she moved.

That was old news to me. After all, it was just like preparing poultry, fish, or meat. For chickens, you had to slit their throats; for fish, you had to slit their bellies...just as I'd demonstrated while fighting wolves earlier.

As one might expect from a thief, Lolidragon snuck noiselessly up behind the wolf without attracting its notice. With a powerful slash, she cut through one of the wolf's hind legs.

<Wolf HP -30>

The wolf instantly spun around and attempted to land a bite, but there was no way it could possibly hurt the agile – and prepared – thief. With the greatest of ease, she ran in circles around it. The wolf, in turn, could not catch up with a maimed leg, and Lolidragon would periodically turn about and slash at it. After taking about five or six of her attacks, the wolf announced that it was going to stop playing, and finally left for heaven.

<Lolidragon has killed Wolf, Lolidragon's experience has increased to XXX/XXXX, Prince's experience has increased to XXX/XXXX>

"Whew, what do you think? I didn't spill a single drop of blood!" She raised her chin and said proudly, "You can tell a pro player from a mile way. When you meet one, you should watch and learn!"

I scratched my face and drew my Black Dao. Giving the closest wolf an upward kick, I followed up with a swing of my blade from below. I'd forgotten to check what Black Dao's attack power was, but it was definitely higher than that of the knife I had been using earlier, judging by the way it severed that poor wolf in two. *Rest in peace!*

"Y-you kicked..." Lolidragon stared at the scene, speechless and thoroughly stunned. *What on earth is this fighting style?* she wondered. *This is insane... To think that I had never even considered this kind of approach...!*

Feeling extremely eager, I stalked over to the next wolf. *It looks like I can finally try out those moves I researched in Street Fighter!*

I launched the wolf into the air with a kick, followed by a second kick upwards. Then, aligning my fist with my body, I punched out at the wolf above me (and only just stopped short of going "*Rising Dragon Fist!*").¹⁸ Still airborne, I kicked the wolf back to the earth.

"..." Lolidragon watched, still speechless.

However, when I attempted Chun Li's most famous move – head down, legs up and extended, twirling in the air like a human helicopter – I discovered that it defied the laws of human physiology and was purely for show. I was rewarded with a sprained waist, a bump on my head, and a bite from the wolf.

Waaah, saliva! Everyone should know by now that when I encountered saliva, I would...go berserk!

*You damn wolf, actually drooling to the point of coating my hand with your slobber! You're dead meat, aaaaah! Kick, Swaying Sword Style, Nine Swords of Du Gu, Toast to the Eight, Quick Sword Technique, Head Slam, "Ten" Strike, Shoulder Throw, Women's Self-Defense!*¹⁹

¹⁸ **Rising Dragon Fist:** This is read as "shōryū-ken" in Japanese (and written as "昇龍拳" in Japanese kanji and "升龙拳" in simplified Chinese) and is a really famous move belonging to Ryu from the fighting game series, Street Fighter. The move is a one-hit blow that can only be executed successfully if the enemy is airborne.

¹⁹ **Swaying Sword... Self-Defense:** The techniques that Prince is using are a mix of famous techniques from Chinese novels, fighting game moves, normal moves and nonsense. *Swaying Sword Style*, "荡剑式" (prn. dàng jiàn shì) and *Nine Swords of Du Gu* "独孤九剑" (prn. dú gū jiǔ jiàn) are both from Jin Yong's The Laughing, Proud Wanderer, or "笑傲江湖" (prn. xiào ào jiāng hú). *Toast to the Eight* is a move belonging to lori Yagami from *King of Fighters*. *"Ten" Strike*, "十字斩" (prn. shí zì zhǎn) seems to be from another game as well (note that the character for "ten" in Chinese is written like a cross, hence the name). *Quick Sword Technique*, "拔刀

“Holy...! Prince, what sort of insane fighting style is this?” Lolidragon demanded, unable to continue watching in silence. She couldn't tell whether she was playing an MMORPG or a fighting game anymore... Or whether the moves she witnessed were from a Jin Yong novel²⁰ or a comic.

I paused, feeling somewhat confused. “I can’t fight like this?”

CHOMP!

GRRR! To actually steal a bite from me while I was distracted, you damn wolf! I continued on my rampage.

She trembled fiercely. “It’s not...against the rules,” she croaked. *But for somebody to actually be able to play like this on an MMO, and a totally clueless warrior, at that...*

“Or could it be because he’s clueless?” Lolidragon mused as understanding dawned upon her. *It’s precisely because he isn’t familiar with conventional methods of gameplay that Prince’s actions are unique. His behavior doesn’t conform to convention at all. He has no limits or restrictions. Rather, he has endless potential and innovation. This is the true way to play a game with a realism level of 99%!*

Watching as I wreaked havoc on the wolves, Lolidragon smiled helplessly.

“He really is a clueless pro player.”

I could vaguely hear Lolidragon saying something. I chopped one last time at a wolf and turned around to ask her if she had said something like “a clueless killer”, only to see...

“Lolidragon, RUN! Behind—” Before I could finish speaking, a wolf three times larger than normal with pure white fur suddenly charged towards her from behind, savagely biting down on her shoulder.

<Wolf King has successfully attacked Lolidragon, Lolidragon HP -150, 100/250>

“Urgh...” Struggling to ignore the acute pain in her shoulder, Lolidragon dashed towards me.

术” (prn. bò dāo sù) refers to the fairly common move of quickly unsheathing one’s blade and, with a single stroke, destroying the enemy. The rest are fairly self-explanatory.

²⁰ **Jin Yong novel:** Jin Yong is the author behind some of the most famous martial arts (or *wuxia*) novels of the past century, including The Legend of the Condor Heroes “射雕英雄传” (prn. shè diāo yīng xióng zhuàn), The Return of the Condor Heroes “神雕侠侣” (prn. shén diāo xiá lǚ) and The Laughing, Proud Wanderer “笑傲江湖” (prn. xiào ào jiāng hú).

Shielding her with my body, I held my dao at the ready as I faced the Wolf King. *What beautiful white fur it has... Looks like I'll be able to get a white cape after all!*

As I daydreamed, the Wolf King suddenly lunged for me. *It's fast!* I barely managed to block, and immediately retreated several steps. Once again, it came lunging in and I decided to use a spin-kick. Unsurprisingly, however, its physical resistance was considerable. Though I'd put all my strength into that kick, the Wolf King merely staggered two steps to the left. It immediately moved in for another attack. Unable to react in time, I could only watch as its jaws clamped down on my left hand.

<Prince HP -80, 320/450>

"Owww..." I raised my dao and slashed at its stomach. *Dear god, its hide sure is thick; I barely managed to nick it!*

<Wolf King HP -30>

Hearing the system notice, I nearly fainted. *Only thirty health? Just one bite from it cost me eighty health, plus the Wolf King's health is probably as much as mine... We're screwed!* I thought, silently crying in my mind.

"Prince, good luck! If it gets too tough, come up here." Hearing this, I glanced back. *Wah! Lolidragon, you sure are fast, getting to safety by climbing a tree in the blink of an eye...*

I had no option but to force myself to calm down. I imagined myself as Chun Li – with her low hit points and weak attack power – facing off against the insanely overpowered Iori Yagami,²¹ controlled by my brother. *Ungh, this is bad! I don't think I've ever won under those conditions in King of Fighters... In any case, the basic principle is to avoid a head-on fight.*

Argh, the wolf is coming this way again! Damn it, I thought, kicking upwards. Too heavy to be lifted into the air at all, the Wolf King was barely knocked over...

<Wolf King HP -15>

Summoning forth the last ounce of my strength, I raised my blade and stabbed down at its belly. *Stab, stab, stab! Damn it, I can't pierce through its hide!*

<Wolf King HP -50>

Waaah! The Wolf King swiped at me. Nooo, don't scar my face... Waaah!

²¹ **Iori Yagami:** A character from *King of Fighters*. He seems to be a pretty powerful character in the game, with the power to manipulate fire and a sadistic personality.

<Prince HP -100, 220/450>

"Prince, you'd better get over here," Lolidragon advised, her face turning pale.

I sprinted towards the tree that she was perched in. However, my speed was somehow lower than the Wolf King's, so I was raked twice by its claws.

<Prince HP -80, HP -80, 80/450>

I'm going to be dead in no time, I thought, If I try to climb the tree, I won't be able to avoid getting mauled...

Up in the tree, Lolidragon watched the scene below with mounting panic. Suddenly, a phrase flashed through her mind: *No limits or restrictions...*

Lolidragon took instant action. Hooking her legs on the tree branch, she hung upside down from the tree and stretched both hands down.

"Prince, trapeze!" *Prince will definitely get it, she thought.*

Seeing the situation, I made use of my momentum and leapt, grabbing her arms. I swung forward in an arc and managed to get up into the tree. Seeing the Wolf King clawing away at the tree trunk beneath, I thought, *It's a good thing I've seen a circus act before.*

Whew! I'm dead beat. I panted furiously. Nearby, Lolidragon held a hand to her chest as she gasped for breath, her nerves similarly frayed. We turned and stared at each other.

"Hahahaha...hehehe," we began to laugh.

"Hurry up and drink your health potions. We still have to come up with a plan to kill this damnable Wolf King," said Lolidragon.

"Mm." It's a good thing I still have those ten health potions from before, I thought, gulping down one potion after another.

In the end it took five health potions to fully restore my health. Touching my face, I was relieved to find that the wound had vanished. *Thank goodness, but now I only have five health potions left. How troublesome.*

"This wolf's hide is just too thick; I can't penetrate it at all. Plus, it was heavy, so there was no way to kick it into the air," I grumbled. *How are we supposed to fight it?*

"It can't be helped, since our levels are too low," Lolidragon replied, her eyebrows furrowing thoughtfully. *I have no idea how to kill this boss Wolf King, but with bosses being*

a rare encounter, it seems a pity to run away without fighting it... "We'll have to look for a weak point. It must have one. So long as we attack its weak spot we should still be able to deal quite a lot of damage, even if our attack power isn't high enough to kill it."

Could this wolf, with a hide so tough it could be made of steel, actually have a weakness? I wondered. Then, I suddenly recalled a saying I'd often read in wuxia²² novels: No matter how hard you train, you can't train your eyes to become like steel!

"Eyes," I croaked out.

Lolidragon nodded. After swiftly coming up with a plan in her head, she removed a length of rope from her pouch. "Prince, have you ever watched a Western cowboy film?"

"... Yeah?"

Lolidragon smiled confidently. "Then there's no problem. We're just swapping the horse for a wolf, so you should be able to handle it."

"...You sure have a lot of confidence in me," I replied. I know I'm terrified... My life is at stake here, and you want me to lasso a Wolf King as though it is nothing more than a horse! As I spoke, I made a lasso from the rope. It's a good thing I used to be a Girl Scout or I wouldn't even be able to tie a live knot.

"Once you've lassoed it, climb the tree and tie the rope to the tree, so the dumb wolf won't be able to move freely. After that, the show's all ours, heh heh heh..."

Am I seeing things? Why does Lolidragon's smile suddenly look so...sadistic? Hallucination! I must be hallucinating!

Take a deep breath. Breathe out, breathe in again, breathe out... Okay! Focusing my gaze on the Wolf King's back, I leapt down from tree and landed squarely on top of it. I wrapped my arms tightly about its furry neck even as the Wolf King – who seemed extremely alarmed – began to buck, thinking to throw me off.

The wolf's movements nearly dislodged me from its back on several occasions. *As if that's going to happen! I thought. Falling off will definitely mean death... You damn Wolf King, I'll show you just how tenacious a woman can be!*

²² **Wuxia:** Written as “武侠” (wǔ xiá) in Chinese, the term literally means “martial arts hero”. A *wuxia* novel, such as *The Return of the Condor Heroes*, often has a myriad of characters who are all masters of martial arts or notables in the pugilistic world and each would usually have a specially name set (or sets) of skills (refer to footnote 20 for some examples).

Lolidragon's face was pale as death as she watched the scene below from her perch in the tree. I, too, had gone pale... But that had more to do with the fact that the wolf's movements were making me rather wolf-sick.

Despite the mayhem, I eventually managed to loop the rope about the Wolf King's neck. I was clawed a few times in the attempt, but the injuries cost me an insubstantial thirty or forty health. Once it was properly collared, I quickly dismounted from the horse – ah, no, the wolf – and ran as fast as I could with the Wolf King hot on my heels.

Once again, Lolidragon and I performed a trapeze act. I then jumped off the tree with the rope in hand. Summoning all my remaining strength, I jerked on the rope and basically hung the wolf from the tree.

Leaping from the tree with a cry, Lolidragon used the ability that only small weapons had–

“*Fatal Blow*.” The attack struck the Wolf King’s left eye spot on.

<Critical hit successful, Wolf King HP -300>

The Wolf King roared in pain. Even though using the tree branch for leverage had saved me a lot of energy, I was about to lose my hold on the rope. Lolidragon immediately used *Fatal Blow* again. However, this time the blow went wide. Failing to stab the Wolf King’s right eye, it merely struck its forehead.

<Wolf King HP -100>

At that moment the rope, having frayed quite a bit from the friction, finally snapped. As soon as it was free, the Wolf King leapt towards its nemesis – Lolidragon – and bit down ferociously. Trapped beneath the Wolf King’s body, she could not escape.

<Lolidragon HP -150, 100/250>

“Lolidragon!”

I dashed towards the Wolf King’s back. The *Fatal Blow* that Lolidragon had just executed reminded me of my own ability: *Inferno Slash*.

“*Inferno Slash!*” The moment I called out the ability, flame sprung up along the length of my blade and I swung Black Dao down in vengeance. Knowing that the Wolf King wouldn’t die so easily, I reversed the motion and executed another Inferno Slash, then another, and another until the fifth and final attack exhausted all my mana.



<System notice: Prince has killed Wolf King, Prince has reached level 12, Prince's, experience has increased to XXX/XXXX, / Lolidragon has reached level X, Lolidragon's experience has increased to XXX/XXXX>

<Prince has learned a new ability: Consecutive Inferno Slashes / Ability: Continuous Attack ability level up – Ability Level 5, can attack continuously up to 6 times>

<Weapon: Black Dao level up – Weapon Level 2, attack power +15>

I kicked the Wolf King's corpse aside. Upon seeing that Lolidragon was still okay – aside from looking rather flattened – I breathed a sigh of relief. *Good thing she didn't die.*

Lolidragon continued to lie on the ground. However, even though her face was dripping with sweat, she was grinning. I smiled back and laid down next to her, but Lolidragon gave me a kick.

“Aren’t you going to hurry and take a look at the loot?”

“Oh.” I lazily sat up and glanced about. Scattered around us was an egg, a pair of shoes, and a small pile of silvers.

Just then, Lolidragon cried out, startling me.

“What’s wrong?” *Did the Wolf King come back to life? No way!*

“Your weapon leveled up?” Lolidragon could see my system notices as we were in a group.

I looked at Black Dao’s stats.

<Black Dao: Weapon Level 2, attack power +15>.

“Yeah. *Second Life* really is strange, if even the weapons can level up.”

I received a whack on the head for that comment. As I saw stars for a second time, Lolidragon roared, “Only weapons of the growing type will level up!”

“Oh...” *Well pardon me for not having read up on the official site! It’s not like you didn’t know about that... If you keep hitting my head, I’ll become an idiot!*

Hearing me mumbling to myself, Lolidragon rolled her eyes. “Do you know how valuable growing-type weapons are? They are similar to godly weapons! Just think: If your sword could continually level up and increase in attack power, what would the advantages be?”

Wahhh! Wouldn't that mean that I'd never have to upgrade my weapon? And that, just by training, my weapon would also level up and become increasingly strong? By this point, my eyes had begun to shine. I had come to realize just how much money I would be saving in the long run.

Seeing the glimmer in my eyes, Lolidragon knew that I'd understood. *Heh! Lucky!* I thought, feeling indescribably joyful.

Aside from the pair of shoes and the money, there was the egg, and neither Lolidragon nor I could wait to find out what pet would hatch from it. We decided to return to the village first so that we could identify the shoes²³ and find a pet shop where we could hatch the egg. Once Lolidragon and I had combined our efforts to skin the Wolf King – *I haven't forgotten my cape, hehehe!* – we happily returned to the village.

The instant we reached the village gates, I realized that I'd made a massive error. *The first time I made this mistake was due to ignorance, the second time is due to IDIOCY. Waaah! I am a huge idiot! To actually fail to wear a mask and even enter the village by the front gate...*

I shifted my stance, ready to begin sprinting, but Lolidragon – who was standing next to me – grabbed my arm with a vise-like grip and practically nestled herself in my arms.

"Hub-by," Lolidragon cooed in a cloyingly sweet voice, leaving my hair standing on end. "Didn't you just say, that I'm your *mo-o-st beloved, mo-o-st beautiful wife?*"

As she spoke, she directed a challenging gaze at all the fellow women surrounding her. Those who met her stare shrank back involuntarily; none were willing to take up the gauntlet as their looks could not compare with hers.

Admittedly, Lolidragon really was an extremely rare ultra-beauty... *Huh? You want me to describe her? It's just the usual, with a face more mature and lovely than mine, boobs bigger than mine (and as far as I can tell, bigger than Rose's), a waist slimmer than mine, legs longer than mine, skin fairer than mine... That type!* Waaah! Once again, my self-esteem received a huge blow.

Just as I was thinking all that nonsense, Lolidragon elbowed me. *Ouch!* I hurriedly replied, "Yes! Of course! You are my most beloved, most beautiful wife."

²³ **To identify:** Rare objects in *Second Life*, such as the shoes picked up by Prince and Lolidragon here, have their stats hidden and must be "identified" by the relevant NPC before players can see the item's details. Games that have similar systems are Ragnarok Online and Guildwars, in which players have to use a magnifying glass and an identification kit respectively to check the stats for rare items.

The moment the words left my mouth, dozens of poisonous glances were shot at Lolidragon. She didn't seem the least bit perturbed, however. As a matter of fact, she seemed rather happy! *Sweat*

Although I had pretty much been coerced into acknowledging Lolidragon as my wife, this deception did have quite a few merits. After all, there weren't many women with the courage to battle an ultra-beauty like Lolidragon over a man. Thus, the dozens of wolves that barred our path slowly slunk away and we were able to saunter safely through the village at our leisure.

After we reached the NPC that provided identification services, I reluctantly parted with five silvers so that we could finally see the shoes' stats. They turned out to be a pair of boots with defense +8 and agility +10, which were exactly what Lolidragon needed as an agility-oriented thief.

We had to pay again at the pet shop, so I forked over another two silvers. *Damn, that's the last of the money we got from fighting the Wolf King.*

Although I really, *really* wanted to own a pet, no matter how I looked at it, Lolidragon – with her relatively low defense – needed a pet much more than I did. Thus, fighting back the longing in my heart, I generously offered, "Lolidragon, this pet's all yours! I'll wait for the next one."

"I don't need it, I already have the boots." *How rare for Lolidragon to be so modest...* But, for the sake of our party's overall combat strength, I still felt that she should have the pet. "Your defense is low, so having a pet will greatly boost your combat potential."

"Don't need it..."

"You don't have to be so polite!"

"*I told you I don't need it!*" Lolidragon suddenly bellowed at me fiercely, giving me a fright. I stared at her, astonished and uncertain as to how to react. Just then, Lolidragon suddenly seemed to cool off, and said weakly, "I can't raise pets!"

Eh? I don't get it!

"I've kept many pets before! But... Not one has had a happy ending."

And so she began to share with me her history of raising pets...

"I had a puppy before. Two days after I bought it, it disappeared while I was taking it for a walk...and never came back. After that, I had a turtle, but I carelessly knocked the tank over...and it fell from the fifth floor balcony to the ground floor. Next, I kept a fighting fish..."

That should have been fine, right? I've had a fighting fish before; they're very easy to take care of!

"Only after it died did I find out that you have to change the water in the tank..."

I was speechless.

"And in the end, I kept a cactus..."

"You're not serious... Even the cactus died?" *It can't be... right?*

Lolidragon said naively, "How was I to know that the cactus needed watering? I thought it didn't need water, so it shriveled up and died! After that, I vowed that, no matter what, I would never keep a pet again..."

That truly is a disastrous history...

After three seconds of silence in memory of the innocent pets, I decided not to pursue the matter further. I bit my finger – ouch! – and let a drop of blood drip onto the surface of the egg.

<*Ding!* Egg successfully hatched>

At that, the shell broke. All the while, Lolidragon and I watched with wide-eyed curiosity, wanting to see just what would hatch from it.

Surprise! Surprise! And still more surprising, because it was simply *unbelievable...*

"Wha– What on earth..." I was at a loss for words, because this pet just *defied imagination*. Even if a sacred beast – such as a kirin, a phoenix or even a dragon – had hatched, I would have been a lot less shocked. I grabbed Lolidragon tightly with one hand and looked at her beseechingly, wanting to confirm that she was seeing the same thing I was.

Lolidragon's face was the picture of bewilderment and her mouth hung slack in a most unbecoming manner. After a long while, she finally shook off her stupor a little. "Prince, could this be... No matter how I look at it, this seems to be...a bun?"

My expression became serious. "No, look more closely: This thing's shape and size all suggest a hidden goodness. With that soft, smooth exterior, that satisfyingly round body, plus that aroma that would make people unable to stop drooling... I don't think it's just a bun. To be precise, it absolutely must be... A MEAT bun!"

“What?!” Lolidragon was shocked...and then cuffed me on the head. “Who gives a damn if it is a meat bun or a vegetable bun! The important thing is, why did our egg actually hatch into a meat bun?”

Sigh! I rubbed my head and protested, “If a hidden GM like you doesn't know a thing about it, then how the hell would *I* know?”

“It could be a problem with the script...” Mulling it over, Lolidragon thought, *If that's really the case, then I'll have to hurry and report it to the higher-ups, in order to prevent other players' pets from hatching into weird stuff.*

Growl! As I caught a whiff of the meat bun's fragrance, I felt a sudden pang of hunger. I swallowed a mouthful of saliva as I stared at it. All of a sudden, the meat bun moved! That movement resembled...the shifting of someone's butt – if a meat bun even had a butt.

“*Lolidragon!* The meat bun moved.”

“What?!” She immediately crouched down next to me and the two of us stared at the meat bun together.

The meat bun was actually...actually *turning around* (*So a meat bun actually has a front and back?*) and was hopping as it turned. Next, a pair of large, watery blue eyes, like those you might see in a cartoon, was revealed to us.

“A meat bun with eyes...” I was somewhat at a loss as to what to do.

As befitting a hidden GM who had some experience with this kind of thing, Lolidragon spoke calmly. “Prince, check its stats.”

I reached out and picked up that delicious-smelling meat bun, while fighting back the impulse to eat it...

<*Ding!* System notice: Please give your pet a name>

...We'll call it Meatbun then! After all, is there a more fitting name?

<Pet owner: Prince | Pet name: Meatbun | Level: 1 | Health: 30 | Mana: 20 | Unspent skill points: 0 | Strength: 3 | Physique: 5 | Agility: 10>

(Unbelievable, the meat bun's faster than me?)

<Intelligence: 6 | Willpower: 7 | Wisdom: 10>

(A meat bun is smarter than me? Gaaah!)

<Abilities: Dog Beating Technique – Ability Level 1, offensive ability, will use up 10 mana / Aroma Release – Ability Level 1, can attract mobs, will use up 30 mana, lasts 20 minutes, range is 10 meters>²⁴

"How is it? Is it really a pet?" Lolidragon asked, curious.

"Yeah... Looks like it."

"...Whoever the game designer is, he sure has a sense of humor," said Lolidragon with an expressionless face, but her lips were drawn into a tight line.

"It doesn't matter; at least...it's pretty cute!" At this, the meat bun in my hands began to rub itself against my palm. It was even emitting a soft purring sound, as though it was a child seeking affection. *How cute!* ...*Although it does feel a bit weird to have a meat bun wanting my affection.*

"Does it have an offensive ability?"

"Yeah." *Dog Beating Technique...*

"In that case, let's test it out on a few man-eating slimes when we leave."

Before we left the village, Lolidragon used her level 8 Tailoring ability – a profession-type ability – to craft a hat and a shirt. She had refused to help me make a cape – *waaah!* – saying, "Your fighting style is so wild. With such exaggerated movements, wearing a cape would only hinder you!"

As we walked up the grassy slope with all the man-eating slimes, I surveyed the surrounding slimes and felt a strong sense of nostalgia...

"Prince, give it a shot!" Lolidragon said, gazing at Meatbun.

"Right!" I turned and looked at the meat bun sitting on my shoulder. "Meatbun... Dog Beating Technique."

It didn't move.

...Not specific enough? I tried again. "Meatbun, use your Dog Beating Technique on the man-eating slime over there."

Still no movement... I'm pissed, I'm pissed – I'M SO PISSED! Don't tell me that this pet has no other use except to look cute? It's my first pet, for heaven's sake!

²⁴ **Meter:** 1 meter = 100 centimeters = 3.28 feet.

Grrr! Picking Meatbun up, I hurled it at the slime. “Go and duel the man-eating slime! Don’t even think about coming back if you lose!”

“What are you getting so angry with a meat bun for?” Lolidragon asked, her shoulders shaking with repressed laughter.

Just then, the meat bun that I’d hurled struck the slime and actually made a loud “bonk” sound, giving me a shock. I quickly looked at Meatbun, deeply worried that my first pet might just be eaten by a man-eating slime and disappear.

<System notice: Dog Beating Technique successfully executed by Meatbun, Man-eating Slime HP -10>

Somebody once said, *if you use a meat bun to hit a dog, you will never see the meat bun again...*²⁵ However, this rule did not seem to apply to my Meatbun – after it hit the man-eating slime, it wheeled three times in the air and came flying back into my hand. It even made a “whee - whee” sound, as if it was cheering and having a lot of fun.

The still-living slime came rushing over, thinking to attack me. However, I threw Meatbun at it again on reflex - even as I shouted, “Meatbun... Dog, beat!”

<System notice: Dog Beating Technique successfully executed by Meatbun, Man-eating Slime HP -10, Man-eating slime has died, Meatbun has reached level 2, Prince’s experience has increased to XXX/XXXX>

Just like that, Meatbun – the pet that would later be known as the strongest pet in *Second Life* – and I defeated our first monster together. I stood there with a bewildered expression while Lolidragon hooted with laughter, pounding the ground with her fists.

We then headed back to the Wolves’ Riverbank and resumed fighting wolves. I continued to employ my kick-and-belly-slit method. Occasionally, I also hurled Meatbun, so as to ensure that it wouldn’t be under-leveled due to a lack of experience.

In addition, Lolidragon told me that I had motivated her (*I motivated her? When? I find that very suspicious...*) and that she had decided to learn from me, so I was to teach her lots of moves from *King of Fighters*.

We stayed in the vicinity of the Wolves’ Riverbank for some time in the following days, slaying tons of wolves and leveling up quite a bit. We used the same method to kill the poor Wolf King five or six times, before moving on to fighting bears.

²⁵ **If you use a meat bun to hit a dog, you will never see the meat bun again:** The original saying in Chinese is “肉包子打狗，有去无回” (prn. ròu bāo zǐ dǎ gǒu, yǒu qù wú huí). The underlying meaning is that such an action will definitely result in failure.

At this point I must mention that, after a few uses, Meatbun's Aroma Release ability – which I'd originally thought was useless – leveled up. The area of effect greatly increased to a radius of 150 meters. By using it, we managed to lure the Wolf King and bears out; we would never have been able to find them otherwise. Also, with a wisdom of 10, Meatbun was able to learn new skills with great ease... Although I suspected that the real reason was not its wisdom, but rather the fact that Lolidragon and I did too many bizarre things with it.

Take, for instance, the other day. Lolidragon wanted to try out her recently acquired, but already level ten, ability "Poisons" – which allowed her to make many types of poisons – so she coated Meatbun with a poison and fed it to a wolf. The wolf was duly poisoned to death and my Meatbun learned a new ability: Poisonous Meatbun. After that, it continued to learn many new abilities by accident... *Sigh! Meatbun, you really are a rare and precious pet.*

There came a day when Lolidragon and I were taking a breather on a cliff, worn out from fighting mobs. Lolidragon lay on the ground while I stood in the face of a strong gust of wind, looking down on the landscape. At that moment, there was a sudden, overpowering feeling in my heart – an overwhelming urge to sing.

"Lolidragon... I want to sing!"

"Go ahead then!" she replied lazily.

"This ain't a song for the broken-hearted / A silent prayer for the faith-departed / I ain't gonna be just a face in the crowd / You're gonna hear my voice when I shout it out aloud / It's my life / It's now or never / I ain't gonna live forever / I just want to live while I'm alive (It's my life) / My heart is like an open highway / Like Frankie said I did it my way / I just wanna live while I'm alive / It's my life"

[Lyrics by Bon Jovi – "It's My Life"]²⁶

I ran my fingers through my wind-tousled hair.

"Lolidragon!"

"Yeah?"

"Perhaps it's not really for as inane a reason as proving my brother wrong that I decided to become a guy."

"Then, what's the real reason?"

"Maybe the real reason is that I just don't want to hide behind anyone, not anymore."

²⁶ **It's My Life:** Song by Bon Jovi.

“I want to kill monsters to my heart’s content, using all kinds of crazy methods and moves, without anyone calling me a violent woman.

“I want to swear and cuss while killing and whenever I’m pissed or annoyed, without anyone saying that it isn’t ladylike.

“I want to be able to laugh after hearing an off-color joke, maybe even add my own retort. I don’t want to be forced to pretend I don’t get it, just to prove how pure and innocent I am, but I don’t want to be called a vulgar woman either.”

I finished my impromptu speech, but Lolidragon did not say anything as I lay down silently and joined her in staring up at the boundless sky.

After a long while had passed...

“Prince.” Lolidragon rolled over and propped herself up as she looked at me.

“Yeah?”

“Let’s create our own legend!”

“What legend?”

“The Legend of Prince! *Second Life*’s greatest player, Prince!” Lolidragon said with a brilliant gleam in her eyes. “We’re not going to take pride in being the wives of the best players; we’re going to take pride in *being* the best players.”

Create a legend! I mused.

After a moment, I turned to look at Lolidragon and we shared a smile.

It’s my life.

Legend, begin.

• Chapter 3 •

A Gentle and Friendly Wolf

“Prince, I think it’s meaningless to continue like this,” Lolidragon said, both her tone and gaze pleading.

My eyebrows furrowed. *Sigh! As I expected, here it comes.*

“Fine, we’ll do what needs to be done!” Gripping her shoulders tightly, I looked at Lolidragon with a firm expression.

“You’ve finally agreed to it...” Seeing how ecstatic she looked, I thought, *Sigh! Forget it, as long as she’s happy...*

“Yaaay! We’re finally out of the newbie area, whew! I was getting bored to death, staying in that tiny area,” she said enthusiastically.

Sigh! Truth be told, I still felt that the nearby Skeletons’ Cave was a pretty good place to train. Even though the experience yielded was not much for the level thirty-three Lolidragon and the level thirty-five me (not to forget the level twenty-three Meatbun!), we could take the mobs down in seconds most of the time, so we actually weren’t leveling up too slowly. I had planned to continue like this all the way to level forty, but Lolidragon was starting to feel restless. She kept whining about wanting to go to the big cities...

Thus, after three days – during which my ears nearly went deaf from her non-stop whining – I reluctantly bade farewell to the skeletons...

Let's go! After all, I was rather curious about the outside world. After paying for our travel fares, Lolidragon and I left the newbie village and began our journey into a new world.

"Prince, why did you pick Star City over Sun City and Moon City?" she asked just before we set out.

I shrugged. "My brother's been hanging out in Star City, and he keeps telling me about the best places to train there. I figured that since I already have some familiarity with it, we might as well go there!"

Upon reaching Star City, I could only think of one word to describe it: *Beautiful*. It really was a beautiful city, with its quaint European-styled streets and buildings, and the star-studded sky overhead. Stepping out of the teleportation point and walking along the white, cobbled streets, I felt as though I had become more elegant and more refined.

Lolidragon clung to me as we walked. Don't misunderstand; this was just a secret arrangement between the two of us. Whenever we had to appear in a place with other players, we would put up a show of affection, or else... Well, I'm sure everyone's gotten the point. (*Sigh! My Liteness ability even reached level three because of all those pretty girls chasing after me as though they were possessed...*) Even so, no matter where we went, the girls nearby would turn to stone and stare at me dazedly, and then turn to glare venomously at Lolidragon.

"Prince, can we dine at a fancy restaurant? Please?" Lolidragon asked, looking at me beseechingly and I scratched my head.

That sounded like a pretty good idea. After all, in the newbie village, the best food you could get was meat buns... However, ever since I had accidentally mistaken Meatbun for a normal meat bun and tried to take a bite, I'd stuck to eating *mantous*.

"Alright. After all, we've got more than enough money, so let's go get a taste of the local flavor!"

After carefully browsing through a catalogue, Lolidragon and I decided on a lakeside restaurant. The building was mostly constructed from clear glass and as the two of us entered, a pretty waitress came over.

"Table for two, please," I said to the waitress with a faint smile (that Lolidragon had drilled into me), looking every inch a prince.

The pretty waitress turned to stone. *Shit*, I thought, breaking out in cold sweat, *I didn't expect the waiters here to be real people!* Without thinking, I tightened my grip on Lolidragon's right arm.

"A hottieee!" The pretty waitress cried out in wonder. It was a soft cry, so only the people on the ground floor heard. I panicked as all heads turned to look at me, thinking, *What—what should I do now? Oh god, looks like it's going to be hard to even grab a bite.*

"Maintain your refined aura, and don't worry! With first-class merchandise like you, plus a super-ultra-beauty like me, nobody will dare to approach us," Lolidragon PMed me. She, the unmatched beauty, had taught me this trick. She had told me, *The more you're being stared at, the more you need to present yourself as superior merchandise. That way, you'll make them feel inferior, and they won't dare approach.*

Fighting back the urge to flee, I adjusted the faint smile on my face a little and said gently, "Miss, a table for two – would you be so kind as to guide us to a seat?"

The pretty waitress reddened and, with some difficulty, finally led us to a seat. Still wearing that faint smile I sat down and turned to stare at the other diners. As expected, it was very effective and those whom I gazed upon didn't dare to look at me again.

I flipped the menu open. Using it as a shield to conceal our faces from others, Lolidragon and I discarded our earlier expressions. Looking for all the world like two people who hadn't eaten a proper meal for several months, the two of us began to discuss the menu in low voices...

"Prince, I want to eat this, and this."

Looking at the pictures, I had to swallow a few mouthfuls of saliva. "I want those too, and this..."

"That looks pretty good too..."

"Lolidragon, you're drooling!"

"You're one to talk, look at your own pauper-like face..."

I retorted, "Haven't you read *The Prince and the Pauper* before?"

"Don't forget to order a few meat buns for Meatbun..."

The pets in *Second Life* required feeding. After lots of experimentation, I'd finally PMed a GM to ask, "Excuse me, GM, but could you tell me what a meat bun eats?"

The GM's response was as follows: "Please do not attempt to make fun of a GM. If you try it again, you will be forced to log off and your account will be suspended for a month."

Following that, the undefeatable hidden GM Lolidragon had brought the entire matter before their superiors. The other GM had been thoroughly lectured by the higher-ups...and I discovered that the normal meat buns in my bag had actually vanished without a trace. As Lolidragon had insisted that she hadn't secretly eaten them, I – dubiously – decided to try feeding Meatbun some normal meat buns. Meatbun had then actually happily eaten *three* of its own kindred...!

Putting down the menu, Lolidragon once again adopted the appearance of a blissful young woman. I too, put on a princely demeanor and successfully gave our order to the blushing waitress.

Time passed excruciatingly slowly as we waited for our meal. For the sake of appearances, Lolidragon and I could only converse softly, plus we had to be careful not to be overheard.

What a pain... Huh? Why can't we let others overhear?

The contents of our conversation were like this...

"Lolidragon, you should give up on Chun Li's ultimate! That helicopter move definitely isn't humanly possible."

"I don't want to! That move is *su-per* cool; I will definitely master it. Plus, look who's talking! You're the one who keeps experimenting with Iori Yagami's *Rage of the Eight Maidens*.²⁷ Now *that* isn't humanly possible."

"No, I'm not. Right now I'm modifying Kenshin's *Nine-headed Dragon Strike*.²⁸

"Sigh! Why is Yang Guo's *Melancholic Palms*²⁹ so hard to execute?" Lolidragon complained.

²⁷ **Iori Yagami's *Rage of the Eight Maidens*:** As mentioned before, Iori Yagami is a character from *King of Fighters* who manipulates fire. *Rage of the Eight Maidens* is one of his signature moves, where Iori uses several normal attacks from the front before grabbing his enemy and blowing them up. (Doesn't sound like it can be done even in *Second Life*, though.) The move is supposedly inspired by an encounter Iori had with eight nuns in a dressing room...

²⁸ **Kenshin's *Nine-headed Dragon Strike*:** Kenshin is the main character from the manga *Rurouni Kenshin*, and the move *Nine-headed Dragon Strike* ("九頭龍閃" in Japanese kanji, prn. kuzu-ryūsen) is one of his moves. It is an unavoidable and deadly technique that requires a lot of speed to strike at the body's nine vital points. Prince often uses this attack in later chapters.

²⁹ **Yang Guo's *Melancholic Palms*:** Yang Guo is the protagonist of the novel *The Return of the Condor Heroes*, written by Jin Yong. Yang Guo was the son of Yang Kang, the villain in the prequel novels *The Legend of the Condor Heroes*. Even as a young boy, he was shunned by many, because they believed that he would grow up to be just like his father. He meets and falls in love with Xiao Long Nü, the female protagonist, a martial arts practitioner five years his senior who also becomes his teacher. (Note that Xiao Long Nü literally means "Little

"Nonsense. After all, the writer – Master Jin Yong – said that, to use *Melancholic Palms*, one must possess feelings of melancholy. When have you ever been melancholic?"

"I have," Lolidragon replied innocently. "I even cried once when I was chopping onions..."

"..."

As Lolidragon and I were having that nonsensical conversation, a group of people were coming down the stairs from the second floor...

"Wu Qing, the Raging Dragon's Valley may be a little dangerous, but with the six of us *and* you, going there to train, it should pose no problem," a handsome and refined human warrior was saying to the guy next to him as they descended the stairs.

"That's right, Wu Qing. Come with us!" Eh? I thought. *That open and honest attitude and expression... Isn't that Li'l Strong? And beside him are Legolas and For Healing Only...*

"Since friend Broken Sword and friend Li'l Strong have offered such a warm invitation, Feng Wu Qing shall not further refuse, and will join you as a member of Rose Team. Let us work hard together from now on!" Feng Wu Qing was wearing a stylish robe³⁰ and holding a jade flute. All that, in addition to that extremely handsome face, was enough to render Rose Team's mage, Snow White Rose, and a pretty human thief, Fairsky, utterly mesmerized.

Dragon Girl"; this is Lolidragon's name, but because most readers are more comfortable with "Lolidragon", we've stuck to using that.)

Their supposedly "indecent" relationship, as well as their martial arts skill and Xiao Long Nü's beauty led them into a lot of trouble and they were separated many times. Subsequently, Yang Guo and Xiao Long Nü were poisoned by their enemies, but they managed to obtain a single dose of antidote. Xiao Long Nü later vanished, leaving behind an obscure message on a cliff about having found another cure, and telling Yang Guo that they would reunite in sixteen years. Everyone (excepting Yang Guo) understood the truth, which was that Xiao Long Nü had committed suicide in order to save Yang Guo, who would have no choice but to take the antidote.

Yang Guo waited faithfully, however, and the despair he felt from his separation from Xiao Long Nü was channeled into the *Melancholic Palms* ("黯然销魂掌", *prn. àn rán xiāo hún zhǎng*), a set of moves so powerful that they rivaled the most powerful martial arts skills. However, the power of the *Melancholic Palms* depended greatly on the user's state of mind – the more despair and sorrow felt, the greater its power. In the end, it turned out that somehow Xiao Long Nü did survive, and the lovers were reunited.

³⁰ **Stylish robe:** Just think of the clothes guys wear in Chinese period dramas.

Sitting by the stairs, I heard every word that was being said. Hearing the name “Feng Wu Qing”, together with that irritating way of talking that was an obvious imitation of Chu Liu Xiang,³¹ I narrowed my eyes. *Don’t tell me it’s... I thought as I turned around slowly...*

That face! Though it’s been beautified, as his twin sister of nineteen years, I am definitely NOT mistaken. It’s that DAMN LITTLE BROTHER OF MINE, Feng Yang Ming! Eh, and that female elf...is Snow White Rose! My dear sister!

At this point, the pretty human girl with them seemed to have noticed me. As expected, she turned to stone.

“Fairsky? What’s the matter? Why have you stopped mid-step?” Legolas asked, seeing that Fairsky had frozen.

“Fairsky?” The rest of Rose Team looked questioningly at Fairsky and then, following her line of sight, turned to look at me...

“What’s wrong, Prince?” Lolidragon PMed me, having seen my strange behavior.

“The most handsome guy over there, the human swordsman, Feng Wu Qing, is my little brother.”

“Does he know...?”

“He knows that I’m a tranny, but he doesn’t know who I am!” Then I added, “Don’t let him find out.”

“Oh. Okay, then behave more naturally; your face is stiff as a corpse’s.”

Hearing that, I adjusted my expression and smiled slightly at them.

“So handsome...” Fairsky said, dazedly.

Feng Wu Qing, however, looked rather annoyed. He was obviously wondering where “that fellow” had came from (*From your house...*) and how that fellow – who was only a little good-looking – had actually dared to snatch the spotlight away from himself. Wu Qing became even more pissed off when he turned around and saw that Rose – even Rose! – was regarding that fellow with an expression of wonder.

At this, I got up and walked over. After all, Rose and the others had helped me before. The very least I could do was to go up and say hi to them.

³¹ **Chu Liu Xiang:** Written as “楚留香” in Chinese, this is the name of the protagonist of a Chinese novel (titled after the protagonist). Think of him as a Chinese version of Robin Hood (taking from the rich and giving to the poor), with a formal yet urbane way of speaking. He is also extremely popular with the ladies.

"It's been a while, Rose, Li'l Strong, Legolas, For Healing Only," I said.

"You know us?" Li'l Strong asked, extremely surprised. His impression was that he'd never met this good-looking guy before. The others had similarly puzzled expressions.

I smiled faintly. "I'm Prince."

"Prince...?"

My smile became wry. *Looks like they've completely forgotten about me*, I thought. "That mask-wearing Prince, remember?"

"Ah... It's you." Li'l Strong lightly rapped his temple, realizing why he couldn't remember this face.

"The one who used taekwondo to fight mobs?" For Healing Only said, his eyes alight with laughter.

"Were you wearing a mask then because you were too good-looking?" Legolas asked with an odd expression.

"Yeah..." Just then, Lolidragon came over to stand beside me. "Ah, let me introduce everyone. This is my companion, Lolidragon. Lolidragon, this is Rose, Li'l Strong, Legolas, and For Healing Only. They've helped me out before."

Lolidragon took me by the arm and gave them an incandescent smile. "Hello."

"So it's you, Prince..." my dear sister, Rose, said bashfully. I broke out in cold sweat at her tone.

Suddenly, my little brother interrupted. "Hello. I'm a new member of Rose Team, Feng Wu Qing."

He gave a slight smile. I recognized that smile as his so-called coolest, most confident, *Chu Liu Xiang*-styled smile. *My brother once told me that if he shows this expression to a girl, it means that he wants to make her fall for him; whereas if he shows this expression to a guy, it means that he wants to challenge him... What the heck! What are you challenging me for!?*

"Hello!" I replied with a faint smile. In my heart, however, I was thinking, *What the hell is up with that challenging expression?! It's pissing me off! Grr, keep that up and I won't be cooking dinner for you later...*

As a strange tension developed between the two of us, the two girls – Snow White Rose and Fairsky – looked at Feng Wu Qing. They then turned to look at me, seeming as though they

were torn between two choices... I felt like collapsing onto the ground as realization hit me.
Now I get it!

STUPID BROTHER! I'm NOT trying to snatch your GIRLS from you! I yelled silently in my head.

My brother only gave a twirl of his jade flute, still playing it cool. He smiled and said, “Friend Prince truly is blessed, to have a significant other as beautiful as Lolidragon; seeing such a *yuan-yang couple*³² leaves me truly envious, sigh!”

I forced a smile. “You flatter us...”

“Is your little brother this much of a skirt-chaser in private, too?” Lolidragon asked in a PM, even as she maintained the appearance of a demure young woman.

“As if. If I’m the only one around, he drops that *Chu Liu Xiang* attitude and becomes a total idiot.”

Upon hearing Feng Wu Qing’s words, Fairsky and Rose both turned pale and Fairsky hurriedly asked, “Prince, are you two really lovers?”

“Yeah, Lolidragon is...my wife.”

Fairsky’s face nearly fell off. To think that she finally met such an ideal hottie, only to find out that he was *married* – and that his wife was an incomparable beauty! Her mood completely soured. Fairsky looked at my perfect and handsome appearance with longing. A *chill just ran up my spine!*

No, I won’t give up! She thought. *I still have a secret weapon...*

Just then, Lolidragon noticed my awkwardness and instantly created an excuse for me to escape.

“Dear, our food’s been served!”

With that, I hurriedly bade farewell to members of Rose Team and returned to my seat to enjoy my meal.

³² **Yuan-yang:** This refers to mandarin ducks, and it is written as “鸳鸯” in simplified Chinese. Mandarin ducks are notable symbols of conjugal love and fidelity as they can often be found in pairs. The phrase used by Wu Qing to describe Prince and Lolidragon here is actually “鸳鸯侠侣” (*prn. yuān yāng xiá lǚ*), with the last two characters referring to a heroic couple or, more accurately, a pair of fighters who are also lovers, like Yang Guo and Xiao Long Nü. If you add in the symbolism of the yuan-yang, it implies that Prince and Lolidragon are fated lovers.

I tucked into my food heartily, despite a nagging feeling that there was something odd about that exchange. Afterwards, Lolidragon and I went on a stroll through the city in order to digest the huge meal we had just eaten.

"Prince, have you thought about forming a party?" Lolidragon asked me.

"What's so good about a party?" I asked, tilting my head to one side.

The knowledgeable Lolidragon began to explain it to me in detail. "Later on, the mobs will become much stronger, so it'll probably become pretty tough for us to fight them on our own. But if we had a priest and a mage, it'll be easier to take them down. We would probably level up even faster than we do now too. Also, with a party we could go to the Adventurers' Guild and accept group quests. If we complete them successfully, they can yield good quest rewards, money, increase our reputation, etc."

"Hmm..." That sounded pretty good to me. "Then let's form a party!"

Hearing that, Lolidragon rolled her eyes. "It's not that simple. A party must have a minimum of five members! Right now, there's only the two of us."

"That—"

"Hold up, the two of you in front," a lovely voice called out imperiously, interrupting me.

Confused, I turned about to see the pretty human girl from Rose Team. I'd met her just a little while before... *I think her name is Fairsky?* "Is something the matter?"

Her hands were on her hips. She seemed to be striving for a fierce, unyielding demeanor...but the end result was neither here nor there, given her small, delicate face. However, at that moment, a row of eight hulking guys suddenly appeared behind her...

What is going on? A robbery? In Star City? Lolidragon and I were thoroughly puzzled. Nearby players stopped to watch, clearly curious about what was going on.

"If I may ask... What business do you have with us?" I said, still maintaining that gentlemanly smile.

So hot... Fairsky thought with a worshipful expression. Her resolve intensified – she would definitely get this gorgeous man to take her as his wife! Thus, the lines she had come up with after a long period of deliberation sprang to her lips.

"The way is mine to clear and the tree is mine to cut; for you to pass through here... With. The. Hottie. You. Must. Part."³³

...All of us – Lolidragon, myself, and the surrounding players that is – were simply *stunned*.

Seeing no response from me, Fairsky stamped her foot. "Listen, Prince. I want you to dump your current wife, Lolidragon, and become *my* husband. I'll feed you, house you, equip you, clothe you, and I'll even give you an allowance." She proudly raised her chin in assurance. "Don't worry, I definitely have money. If you don't believe me, I can give you fifty thousand gold first."

I was confounded. "You mean... You want to take care of me?"

"That's right!"

In secret, Lolidragon had long since started to laugh till her sides split; however, for the sake of her image, she fought valiantly to control her laughter. The rising corners of her mouth were the only evidence of her mirth.

The spectators, on the other hand, had long since burst into laughter. Amidst the babble, I could hear a few remarks, like: "Whoa, what a manly babe", "Take care of me too, babe", and "Che, why don't you take a look at yourself first!".

"What to do, Lolidragon... And stop laughing, will you," I PMed her plaintively.

"Ahahaha! ...Just turn her down, obviously. After all, what can she do to you on the streets in broad daylight anyway?" Lolidragon replied, choking with laughter.

Ignoring the two-hundred-decibels-loud laughter around us, I had no choice but to force an apologetic expression onto my face. *Waaah! I'm an innocent party...* "I'm very sorry, but I have no intention of abandoning my wife, so please... Look for a husband elsewhere!"

Damn it! Fairsky thought, looking at Lolidragon with apparent fury. The latter, however, appeared to be totally unconcerned and was busy examining her fingernails. This only enraged Fairsky further. "Boys, kill that woman and send her back to the rebirth point."

Her eight underlings looked at each other in hesitation – after all, to kill such an exquisitely beautiful woman was simply...unthinkable!

Furious, Fairsky shouted, "Hurry up and do it! If you kill her, I'll give you fifty thousand!"

³³ **The way...must part:** In Chinese, this is “此路是我开，此树是我栽，要打此处过，留下帅哥来” (*prn. cǐ lù shì wǒ kāi, cǐ shù shì wǒ zāi, yào dǎ cǐ chù guò, liú xià shuài gē lái*), and a literal translation would be “I open this road, I plant this tree, if you want to go on your way, leave the hottie here”. The phrase originated from some *wuxia* novel or another (sans the hottie part) and it is basically a threat couched in flowery language.

The two of us paled and Lolidragon seemed to be blazing with anger. “Don’t you dare to even *think* of doing something to us out here on the main street!”

Tempted by the promise of fifty thousand gold, the eight thugs slowly approached us. Hurriedly, I shielded Lolidragon with my body. The surrounding players began to mutter resentfully, but a single sentence from Fairsky made them hesitate to involve themselves. “If anyone dares to interfere, I’ll get these boys to kill you over and over again until you return to level one.”

“Prince...” Lolidragon’s face was now pale as a sheet as she hid behind me.

“Don’t be afraid. If you die, I’ll die with you. After all, it’s just a level, we can always retrain,” I comforted Lolidragon, who seemed to calm down a little upon hearing my words.

“I’ll ask you again, Prince. Will you be my husband? If you agree, I’ll let Lolidragon go.”

Fairsky’s self-centered speech nearly drove Lolidragon into an inarticulate rage. “You damn bitch! Even if you kill me until I hit level one, Prince will still be *MY* husband!”

Hearing that, Fairsky was incensed. “Kill her.”

One guy, dazzled by the promise of fifty thousand gold, decided to rush in ahead and claim the entire reward for his own. He came striding in, forcefully wielding a double-headed axe. In response, I reached into my pouch and grabbed my powerful assistant – Meatbun – and lobbed it savagely at Fairsky’s hirelings.

“Meatbun, use *Poisonous Meatbun*.” As Meatbun flew towards their heads, it released a stream of poison gas.

<Thugs A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H successfully poisoned, HP -20/s, will last for 20 minutes, can be cured with a major antidote>

Once Meatbun returned to my hand, I dashed towards Thug A at lightning speed, making full use of the temporary confusion and fright caused by Meatbun. “*Nine-headed Dragon Strike!*”

Nine-headed Dragon Strike was a move from the *Rurouni Kenshin* manga that I’d copied and modified. It combined normal hacking and slashing with moves such as the “*Ten*” Strike through the use of my *Continuous Attack* ability.

At present, it allows for ten continuous attacks, so perhaps I should rename ‘Nine-headed Dragon Strike’ as ‘Ten-headed Dragon Strike’...

When added to the attack power of my level fifteen Black Dao and the fire damage from *Inferno Slash*, the result was an insanely powerful move – one that could be considered my ultimate move for the time being. Even the strongest mob in the newbie area – the boss Skeleton King – had turned into a pile of broken bones before the move could be completely executed.

“Aaaaaaargh!” Thug A let out a blood-curdling scream before turning into a pillar of light and shooting into the sky.

I immediately grabbed a mana potion from my pouch and began gulping down the contents. The greatest problem with using the *Nine-headed Dragon Strike* lay in the amount of mana it drained. Luckily enough, the others were all too stunned by the sudden violence to grab the opportunity and attack me.

Remembering how Kenshin would always look at his enemies coldly and cause them to lose confidence, I too looked coldly at the remaining seven thugs and spoke in an icy tone. “If anyone thinks he can survive my *Nine-headed Dragon Strike*, I’d like to invite him to step up!”

The thugs had finished dosing themselves with major antidotes, but none of them dared to approach us first. After all, having watched me replenish my mana, all were well aware that the first to charge over would be offering the others a free meat-shield!

“Bloody hell! We’ll take him on together, boys, and see how he likes fighting seven-on-one!” Thug B finally roared. All seven thugs came charging over together.

What followed could only be described as a brawl. I relied on my agility – which was higher than theirs – to dart about in that sea of blades. However, I still wound up taking a number of hits and was completely unable to retaliate. Lolidragon’s situation was no better. She had sustained no damage for the time being due to her agility, which was even higher than mine, but without much attack power, she could hardly injure the enemy either.

“Hngh!”

In the instant I was distracted, one of the thugs had used an ability and chopped down on my back. *Damn him*, I thought, fury rising within me. *As they say, if I’m going to die, I’m going to make sure that I go down in flames!* I immediately executed another *Nine-headed Dragon Strike*. It caused a pillar of white light to shoot into the sky, but the cost to me was high; I took another five or six blows. I was on the verge of death...

“Prince...” The blood drained from Lolidragon’s face. She dived over, executing Chun Li’s ultimate move – *we’ll call it Helicopter Kick for now!* To my surprise, Lolidragon had managed to modify the move. I watched as she did a handstand, spinning non-stop with both hands still on the ground. She lacked the physical strength, so her legs couldn’t

possibly deal much damage, but she had actually fitted hidden blades onto the tips of her boots. From what I knew of Lolidragon, the blades must have been coated with her most powerful poison, *Seven Steps Soul Scatter*.

Of course, you wouldn't really die in seven steps, but with a HP degeneration rate of -50/s, a regular player would probably be dead within a minute if they didn't cure the poison.

The poisoned thugs were horrified to see their health dropping at such a rapid rate, and hurried to search their inventories for antidotes. Making use of the confusion, Lolidragon dashed over and hauled me out of the combat zone, even as I began to guzzle down a health potion.

Before I could put a second potion to my lips, however, the thugs charged us again. *God damn it!*

Lolidragon and I both paled noticeably. Nearby players, seeing that no one else had stepped up all this while, decided to just continue watching from the sidelines. Some of the girls could not bear to watch any longer, however. They left, shielding their eyes from the sight.

Looks like Lolidragon and I will really have to die for the sake of our 'love', waaah! Can I choose not to die under such bizarre circumstances?

Just as I was about to exchange blows with the thugs, a thunderous, bestial roar filled the air. "STOP!"

All heads turned to look at the source of the voice. It wasn't too hard to spot the target, since it was a beastman – in particular, a hideous wolfman – with matted gray fur and, as far as I could estimate, a height of nearly two meters. His gigantic fist seemed like it could send a man to hell with one blow and his arms were as thick as my thighs, so his legs were probably thicker than my waist.

Panic filled the eyes of the remaining thugs; nobody in their right mind would have wanted to fight the enormous, ugly creature in front of them.

The hideous wolfman looked at the thugs with a vicious glare. "SCRAM, UNLESS YOU WANT TO BE SHREDDED TO PIECES!"

They gulped nervously and retreated a few steps, but were still reluctant to run away.

Making use of the opportunity, I drank my last health potion. With my health replenished, I stood up and, as if to emphasize the wolfman's words, I shifted into the starting stance for the *Nine-headed Dragon Strike*. That, compounded with the icy gaze in my eyes, led to the desired outcome: Terror.



Fairsky, standing to one side, was also pale with fright. She had only intended to kill Lolidragon, and not to hurt her Prince Charming. In an imploring tone, she asked, "Prince... Do you really love Lolidragon so much, to the point that no other woman would do?"

I heaved a troubled sigh. *This face of mine is really a magnet for trouble!* "That's right. I'm sorry..."

Hearing that, Fairsky's eyes filled with tears. With a low sob, she finally fled, crying. Taking stock of the situation, the thugs realized that the fifty thousand were forever out of their reach, so they left as well.

I watched as the thugs scattered and breathed a sigh of relief. Thinking of my close shave with death a moment ago, I began to feel afraid again. Without realizing it, my legs folded beneath me and I sat down hard on the ground. Just then, however, a soft, comforting white light enveloped me...

"Are you all right?" the ugly wolfman asked me, concerned. I lifted my head to look him and saw that he was grinning at me. I smiled back in reassurance, my heart filled with sudden warmth. Somehow, his ugly face seemed to be very friendly and trustworthy.

Lolidragon, however, looked at the gray, ugly wolfman with an extremely astonished expression.

"You... You're a priest?" Lolidragon stuttered. What the ugly wolfman had just cast was actually a priest's medium-level healing spell...

The wolfman answered with some embarrassment, "Yes, I am a beastman priest."

I was stunned for a moment, and then burst out laughing. "Did...did we just use a priest, an injured warrior and a *thief* to scare off *SIX warriors*? Ahahaha..." As I broke off into laughter, Lolidragon and the ugly wolfman both began to chuckle as well.

Lolidragon and I exchanged a glance. We saw in each other's eyes a shared admiration for the wolfman. Both of us were clearly thinking, *Nobody else in that crowd dared to come forward and help us, but he, a priest with no attack power, actually had the courage to step up. Doesn't that call for admiration and gratitude?*

"What's your name?" I asked the wolfman. *I obviously can't keep calling him 'ugly wolfman'. Besides, I don't feel that he's ugly at all anymore.*

"I'm called...Ugly Wolf. It's a very fitting name," he said with a smile. However, I could see that the look in his eyes was one of painful humiliation. I felt a pang of sorrow and made up my mind...

"Then... Wolf, my legs seem to have given out on me. Could you help me back to the hotel?" I asked, lifting up my arms helplessly.

"Certainly, certainly," he said quickly.

And so, with one arm over Wolf's shoulders and another over Lolidragon's, we slowly made our way back to the hotel.

As we walked, I said, "Wolf, we need a priest, and I was wondering if you might be interested..."

• Chapter 4 •

The Necromancer and the Bard

In an extremely romantic European-styled garden, an angelic and devastatingly handsome elf sat beside a beautiful, rose-like girl. Together, they formed the flawless image of a fairy-tale prince and princess and the only word to describe them was “perfection”. Unfortunately, the image was marred by an ugly wolfman seated together with them. All the players nearby shook their heads, feeling as though they had ordered a bowl of *za cui* noodles,³⁴ only to find out that the delicious pig’s intestines had not been cleaned properly and still contained some feces.

Putting on a charming smile, the corners of my mouth lifted up as I carefully examined the white menu in my hands. Having made up my mind, I lifted my head, ignoring the mesmerized gaze the other players were giving me as I turned to an equally enraptured waitress. In an incomparably gentle voice, I said, “Miss, a bowl of soy milk and five *you tiao*³⁵ please.”

Blinking her eyes enchantingly, Lolidragon said lightly, “Prince, you really know how to ruin the mood; what’s with the soy milk and *you tiao*?” The players around us nodded in agreement.

³⁴ **Za cui noodles:** An unusual noodle dish that seems to be very popular in Hong Kong and Taiwan. It often includes carrots, pig’s skin, curry fishballs, pig’s blood, and pig’s intestines, together with the noodles.

³⁵ **You tiao:** Deep-fried bread sticks. There are huge air pockets in the flour, so even though it’s deep-fried, the inside is actually quite fluffy. A popular Chinese snack or breakfast food.

"At least have some sesame cake! Miss, get me two bowls of soy milk and ten sesame cakes," Lolidragon said.

Just then, Wolf-dàgē³⁶ added in his bestial voice, "Little sister, also add a cup of Italian espresso, Caesar salad, and a roast..."

After finishing her soybean milk, Lolidragon wiped her mouth daintily and spoke. "Prince, I think we should hurry and find more teammates!"

"What's the rush? We have Wolf-dàgē to heal us, so we won't have trouble gaining experience. We can slowly gather other teammates!" I swallowed a mouthful of *you tiao*, slowly answering the question.

"No, experience has nothing to do with why I want more teammates."

"Then?" I asked. *Why else would we need teammates other than leveling up?*

Lolidragon heaved a deep sigh. "The way is mine to clear and the tree is mine to cut; for you to pass through here... With. The. Hottie. You. Must. Part."

"Did you have to rub salt in my wounds?" *That damn Lolidragon! I... I'm so pissed!*

Lolidragon snickered. "Wounds are meant for rubbing salt in... Prince, the point is that we managed to scare off Fairsky this time, but that doesn't mean there won't be others who will try to snatch you from me. The next time, I might not be able to protect your virtue... That's why – for your pretty little face, for your virtue, for our glorious monster-fighting honeymoon trip – we need to build up our combat strength quickly. That's why comrades are the most important assets in our battle to protect your virtue."

"...." I was rendered speechless. *Lolidragon really knows how to scare people*, I thought, *But she's usually right. Will I really be offering up my virtue to my fellow females? Could this be considered lesbianism?*

Lolidragon thought carefully. "I think we should get a mage and, after that, an archer. That should complete our party."

At this moment, Wolf-dàgē spoke. From what Lolidragon and I had gathered of Wolf-dàgē, he only opened his mouth when we were discussing something important. Therefore, he rarely spoke.

"Finding any mage is easy, but it will be difficult to find a mage that suits us. Some mages specialize in area spells good for handling a number of mobs at a time. Others prefer to

³⁶ **Wolf-dàgē:** The suffix is written in Chinese as “大哥”, meaning “big brother” or “elder brother”.

focus their attacks so that they have stronger spells, but they can only take on one mob at a time this way. There are mages who choose to spam weak but fast attacks, as well as mages who prefer all-or-nothing bursts of magic. The type of elemental magic also plays an important role, so we'll have to find a mage depending on what types of mobs you want to fight..."

Amazing! Both Lolidragon and I turned starry-eyed, staring at Wolf-dàgē in awe. *It's amazing how much theory there is behind finding a mage...*

"You are amazing, Wolf-dàgē. You know so much..."

Wolf-dàgē gave us an embarrassed smile. "It's nothing really. I wanted to be a mage before, that's why I researched the class."

A two-meter-tall mage? I smiled numbly at the thought.

"Then why didn't you become one?" Lolidragon also had a slightly stunned smile, but she thought, *a two-meter-tall mage was at least slightly less strange than a two-meter-tall priest...*

Wolf-dàgē heaved a deep sigh. "Err...!"

"If you don't want to talk about it, it's okay." *Wolf-dàgē probably has his reasons...* Rubbing salt on other people's wounds was Lolidragon's specialty, not mine – although I was also rather curious.

"It's not really a big deal." With a plaintive expression, Wolf-dàgē stood up and turned around to gaze at the faraway horizon, the very picture of dejection. *Just what could have happened that led Wolf-dàgē to give up his dream of being a mage?*

Wolf-dàgē's expression darkened. "Actually, the reason was because... There were too many people lining up outside of the mages' temple, so I went to the empty priests' temple instead."

My foot sent the skeleton warrior's skull flying and with a spin kick, I broke the skeleton's backbone. There was a loud "*crack*" as the skeleton turned into a pile of bones. Behind me, Lolidragon was busy gathering bones – *I'm not joking. Since half a kilo of bone dust is worth ten silver coins, this is definitely not a laughing matter!*

Before I forget to explain, the reason we're here is because Wolf-dàgē said he wanted to see our combat technique before trying to find compatible teammates. That's how we ended up

in this eerie forest full of skeletons, using our craziest techniques to show Wolf-dàgē what we were made of.

Wolf-dàgē stared at me in disbelief. “Your taekwondo posture is incorrect. Come! Let Dàgē teach you.”

Wolf-dàgē then sent three skeletons flying in one with just one kick... *Are you really a priest?*

“Ahaha! I was leveling alone before, so I gained some strength... Here, come, let me buff you with *Song of Battle*, *Fleet-footedness*, and *Impenetrable Wall*.”

After receiving a huge boost in strength, agility, and defense, I finally understood the benefit of having a priest. As I darted through the midst of a bunch of skeletons, I was reminded of the last time Lolidragon and I were fighting low-leveled skeletons in the cave at the newbie's village...

“Lolidragon, are you sure we can fight against skeletons?” I stared at the dark, creepy cave, feeling myself break out in goosebumps.

Just thinking about the skeleton’s white frames in the school clinic left me feeling scared... And, more importantly, skeletons didn’t drool, so what was I going to rely on to go on a rampage?

Lolidragon too, gulped nervously and said, “We...should...be able to...”

We forced ourselves to enter the cave. *Lolidragon! Go and check things out up ahead... What? What do you mean, 'no'?! Are you really a thief?*

Since it couldn’t be helped, I had to light up a torch and walk ahead with Lolidragon hiding behind me. Suddenly, we heard the sound of bones grating up ahead. My face turned pale. I turned to Lolidragon, hoping to find some comfort in her presence, only to see that *her* face had turned green.

“Ahh....” Lolidragon suddenly let out a squeak, her forefinger shakily pointing in front of her.

I turned to discover that three white skeletons had suddenly appeared, but to my surprise I realized that I wasn’t really afraid. As I looked left and right, I kept thinking that those three skeletons looked like the sparerib soup that my brother and I had eaten yesterday. I raised my Black Dao and approached the skeletons cautiously...

Lolidragon:

I stared at Prince, who was fearlessly approaching the group of skeletons and thought, *Looks like she's becoming manlier! Not bad, not bad; a handsome face cannot have a spineless personality.*

Suddenly, something white fell on my shoulder. Timidly, I peeked at my left shoulder to see what had fallen. *Ahhh! A skeleton's hand!* I tried to shake it off, but it was clutching onto my shoulder tightly. *I'm scared!*

Scared to the limit of my endurance, I finally understood what Prince meant when he was talking about hating the taste of saliva... *I'm furious, furious! I'm so furious! Stupid skeleton, don't you know you can't just grab onto the shoulder of a fair maiden?*

I reached out, grabbed the elbow joint of the skeleton, twisted it forcefully...and found that there was only a skeleton's arm left in my hand. *Uwah!* I hurriedly threw it aside, but the stupid skeleton decided to use its other hand to grab me.

I immediately repeated my earlier movement... And then I lost control. Seeing the white bones in front of me, I dismantled them the moment I reached out my hand, destroying bone after bone...

I regained consciousness after sometime, and the first thing I saw was Prince staring at me in disbelief and the ground littered with bones. The system notice stated that I had just learned a new skill: *Dismantle Bones*.

As the saying goes, "Saliva for Prince, skeletons for me." - Lolidragon.

"Help... Nooooo!" A sharp, shrill scream snapped me out of my stupor. At first, I thought it was Lolidragon going wild again, but when I turned around, Lolidragon was sitting on the ground, crushing bones into bone dust with a blank look still on her face.

"Prince, the voice came from there," Wolf-dàgē said as he pointed towards the direction of the sound.

Lolidragon, Wolf-dàgē, and I quickly ran in that direction and saw a very cute girl of the angel race, with her hair tied in two buns, covering her face as she dashed toward us, sobbing.

"Flaming Skeletons..." Wolf-dàgē's expression became grave.

Watching the fiery skeletons pursue the pretty little girl, my expression was no less grave than his. *If I get burned, it'll really hurt!*

It couldn't be helped however, as the bun-haired girl was already rushing toward us. I could only raise my sword to ward off the mobs, reminding myself not to give in to the impulse to pull some crazy stunts. From my cooking experiences, I knew better than anyone just how painful burns could be...

"Nine-headed Dragon Strike!" Nine blades of flame shot out, rapidly striking at nine different spots on the skeletons. Ah! These Flaming Skeletons are incredible; even players and the skeleton boss from the newbie's village couldn't handle this technique, but for these skeletons to actually stand their ground against it...

I felt a growing sense of defeat. I retreated, drank a mana potion, and executed yet another *Nine-headed Dragon Strike. Still not dead?* Furious, mana potion, *Nine-headed Dragon Strike*, mana potion, *Nine-headed Dragon Strike!* I panted heavily. *Such powerful skeletons! To still be alive even after so many Nine-headed Dragon Strikes...*

"Prince, if you continue to use fire-based attacks against these Flaming Skeletons, then I'm afraid you'll be fighting until *Second Life* closes down," Wolf-dàgē couldn't help but remark. His words were accompanied by the sound of Lolidragon's snickers.

"...A mistake, a mistake!" Embarrassed, I extinguished the flames on my blade and simply used the "*Ten*" Strike instead. This time, the Flaming Skeletons scattered into pieces onto the ground.

<*Ding!* System notice: Prince has PKed Doll's minions, Flaming Skeletons, Reputation -100>

...That's a false accusation; when did I do that?

Wolf-dàgē's and Lolidragon's expressions changed from mirth to alarm and they came over to stand beside me cautiously. Shielding the bun-haired girl by standing in front of her, a bunch of questions burst from Lolidragon's mouth. "Little girl, how many people summoned those Flaming Skeletons? How did you manage to offend them?"

The girl shyly replied, "I did not offend anyone."

"Then why were the player Doll's Flaming Skeletons chasing after you?" I asked suspiciously.

"They were my skeletons..."

What? Did I hear correctly? The three of us exchanged a flabbergasted look, but Lolidragon forced her voice to remain calm. "You are 'Doll'?"

“Yes...”

“You summoned those skeletons?”

“Yes...”

“You are a necromancer?”

“Yes...”

“You are of the angel race?”

“That’s right!”

“Then why were you running and even shouting for help?” I was slightly pissed.

Doll said tearfully, “Because this is my first time summoning those scary skeletons! They actually had fire, how frightening! Doll just kept on running, but those skeletons kept on chasing me, *waaaaah!*”

The corners of Lolidragon’s mouth twitched. “You summoned them, so of course they would follow you! Why be a necromancer if you are scared of skeletons? Besides, you’re from the angel race...”

The cowering Doll suddenly raised her head and lifted her chin. “Necromancers are not evil. Their real job is to discover the true meaning of death and unveil death’s mystery. Besides, a necromancer’s real forte is medicine; no one is more familiar with the body than a necromancer!”

“Little girl, it seems like you’ve memorized *The Eye of the Soul*³⁷ quite well!” Lolidragon said coldly.

Ah, no wonder those words sounded familiar; they came from the novel The Eye of the Soul.

After Doll heard this, she stamped her feet on the ground angrily and said, “I am different from the necromancer in *The Eye of the Soul*! I am...ahem! Ahem!” She suddenly cleared her throat, lifted her wand, and twirled around while reciting, “For love and justice! I am the pretty necromancer, Doll! Evil, beware! In the place of the skeletons, Doll will punish you!”³⁸

³⁷ **The Eye of the Soul:** “亡灵之眼” (*prn. wáng líng zhī yǎn*) is a fantasy novel published by Adventurers’ Heaven (which also published *½ Prince*).

³⁸ **For love...punish you!:** Reference to the Japanese manga and anime series, *Sailor Moon*. This is an obvious parody of the battle-cry used by Sailor Moon, the protagonist of the *Sailor Moon* series.

As she finished, one foot touched the ground while the other was lifted up playfully and both of her forefingers were pointing at her dimples.

Both Lolidragon and I could say nothing in response, but Wolf-dàgē asked, “Little sister, what level are you?”

While still maintaining that extremely difficult pose, Doll replied, “No one's applauding, so I'm not saying!”

Clap, clap, clap... No choice; we had to start clapping.

“Hehe, I am level thirty! Amazing, right?” Doll said proudly as she reverted to a more normal stance.

At this point, I should mention that Wolf-dàgē is level thirty-six, one level higher than me.

“Level thirty.” Wolf-dàgē considered, then asked, “Doll, what abilities have you learned? How many skeletons can you summon?”

Doll tilted her head and with an adorable expression recited, “*Slumbering skeletons of the dead in the dark and remote depths of the world, abandon your slumber and answer my call, the call of the necromancer, Doll!*”

As soon as she finished chanting, the ground began to shake and many skeletal hands began to pop out of the ground like bean sprouts...

“Prince, there's a skeleton grabbing my foot,” Lolidragon trembled.

Oh no, if Lolidragon gets touched by the skeletons, then...!

“Aaaaaah!” Lolidragon let out a piercing scream and reached out to grab the offending skeleton's hand. She actually *pulled* the skeleton completely out of the ground, as though she were pulling out a radish. Then, using her *Dismantle Bones* ability, she tore the skeleton apart. After she finished, she moved on to tear apart another and another and another...

Lolidragon, what are you doing, harvesting? Forget it, I thought. Despite my words, I immediately began to pick up bone after bone – half a kilo of bone dust is worth ten silver coins and the last time Lolidragon went on a rampage, we gained a total of ten gold coins. *Looks like this time we can eat at a restaurant!*

“Prince... Player-summoned skeletons will automatically disappear, you cannot sell them.” Wolf-dàgē's voice drifted into my ears.

Wh-wh-what?! Why can't we sell them? I watched sorrowfully as the gold in my hands disappeared.

To one side, Doll watched as her skeletons were turned into a pile of bones. Awestruck, she exclaimed, "My idol! Could I inquire as to that big sister's name?" she asked me, her eyes glittering with reverence.

"...Lolidragon."

"Lolidragon-jiějie³⁹ is so powerful, to know every joint on the skeleton and twist it so that every bone in the skeleton's body breaks! That lack of hesitation and methodical execution is amazing! Lolidragon-jiějie definitely has a profound understanding of the souls of the dead. I must learn from her," Doll said, looking entranced as she watched Lolidragon dismantle the arm of a skeleton.

I watched speechlessly as Lolidragon, who apparently had a profound understanding of the souls of the dead, used her strength to dismantle bone after bone. I was a little worried, since at this rate her infamy might soon earn her a spot on the hall of shame...

"One, two...four...eight..." Wolf-dàgē began counting the number of skeletons no more slowly than Lolidragon was pulling skeletons out from the ground. "That's a total of eight low-leveled skeletons! That's not bad at all. How many flaming skeletons can you raise, Doll?"

Doll, who had been looking at Lolidragon with reverence, began to chant automatically, "*Skeletons of the vengeful dead, cloaked in the raging flames from the depths of hell, answer my call, the call of the necromancer, Doll!*"

Four flame-enveloped bean sprouts popped out off the ground. I immediately dashed toward them, ashen-faced, deeply worried that Lolidragon might—

"Ahhhh!"

...Looks like I'm too late. Lolidragon's already clutching her hand and whimpering tearfully.

Before I could reach Lolidragon, however, a figure faster than me had already charged over. "Lolidragon-jiějie, are you okay?! Waaah! Doll didn't mean for big sister to get hurt." As she finished speaking, Doll began to cry, wailing loudly. Lolidragon stared at her in bewilderment for a moment and then looked at me.

I scratched my face. "Doll says she idolizes you, as you have a profound understanding of the souls of the dead."

³⁹ **Lolidragon-jiějie:** The suffix is written in Chinese as "姐姐", meaning "older sister".

“...”

“Prince, I think we should ask Doll to become a member of our party,” said Wolf-dàgē. Seeing Lolidragon’s expression, he added, “Doll’s ability to summon the dead is quite impressive. Right now, Prince is our only warrior. No matter how strong he is, he cannot go on the offense *and* protect a priest and a mage at the same time, so a necromancer with a number of skeleton minions would be quite suitable for our group.”

I stared at him, incredulous. *Our priest actually needs protection?*

Doll began to act all cutesy. “Oh goody! I want to follow Lolidragon-jiějie.”

A chill ran down Lolidragon’s spine.

I had no opinion on the matter and thus our party – with two votes for, one against, and one abstained – gained a new member. In addition to a handsome, transgendered elf warrior, a beautiful elf thief (who always refused to scout ahead), and a two-meter-tall wolfman priest (able to send three skeletons flying with one kick) – our team now included an angel necromancer of love and justice who feared skeletons...

Truth be told, shouting “DIE!” at the skeletons one moment and fighting alongside them the next leaves me with an indescribably weird feeling. At least I’m slightly better than Lolidragon; she keeps huddling behind Wolf-dàgē’s broad back. Only when she becomes embarrassed of having leeched too many experience points does she occasionally stick her head out and throw a hidden blade...

God damn it, Lolidragon! Aim carefully before you throw! As two throwing knives whizzed by, scraping the side of my head, I was started to feel the urge to beat someone up.

Do you guys miss Meatbun? I had actually wanted to take Meatbun out for some throwing practice so that it could level up, but the moment I took Meatbun out, Doll squealed about how cute it was and snatched it away.

See! Doll is still over there playing with Meatbun, tossing it up and down... Wait a second! Why is Doll holding a bone in her hand? And why is Wolf-dàgē beside her, looking as though he is coaching her in something?

Also, why does Doll’s posture seem to suggest that she’s playing baseball?

Before I could utter a word, the baseball – Meatbun, that is – had already been sent flying with a hit from the bone.

“Right, your batting posture is pretty good,” Wolf-dàgē said approvingly.

My jaw fell open. I could only look on helplessly as my poor Meatbun was sent flying again, hooting happily as it went. It first struck the skeleton standing next to me (which had been summoned by Doll), before rebounding and hitting a second skeleton, then rebounding back to the first, then the second, the first, the second...

My head swiveled left and right continuously as I watched my innocent Meatbun bounce back and forth between the two skeletons.

<Skeleton HP -50, HP -50, HP -50>

With a “bam!” and a “bonk!”, two innocent skeletons announced their departure from the world of the living.

<*Ding!* System notice: Prince’s pet Meatbun has PKed Doll’s Skeletons, Reputation -200>

<*Ding!* Pet: Meatbun has learned a new skill – Double Kill>

I seized Meatbun as it flew back to me. I looked once at Meatbun, and then at the two-headed giant I was fighting, the corners of my mouth lifting into a cold smile.

“Meatbun, use *Double Kill*.” I tossed Meatbun at the mob with a savage throw, but it just bounced once before returning to my hand. That left me in deep trouble for the giant began charging at me, and I ended up having to hack the two-headed giant to death. Wolf-dàgē even had to heal me once.

Finally, I can take a look at the skill’s description...

<Double Kill: Offensive ability; Requirements: Requires a stick-like object in order to bat pet; Damage: 80>

A *stick-like object!* I looked everywhere, at first wanting to borrow a bone stick from Doll. After some thought, I realized the bone would only last for a little while before disappearing. Instead, I took the sheath of my sword and – with a swing – sent Meatbun flying.

“Meatbun, *Double Kill*.”

This time, Meatbun struck a two-headed giant with impeccable precision and destroyed half of its HP. Then I rushed forward and, using *Continuous Attack*, kicked the two-headed giant until it fell. The other, surrounded by Doll’s Flaming Skeletons, fell as I dealt it a final blow.

I then lent my sheath to Wolf-dàgē so he could use it as a bat. Doll stood beside Wolf-dàgē, tossing Meatbun to him so he could hit it. We waited until after Meatbun had destroyed half of the mob’s HP before the Flaming Skeletons and I finished it off.

What a perfect way to level up!

In the next few days we perfected a new method: I would use Meatbun's *Aroma Release* to attract many mobs after Wolf-dàgē buffed Lolidragon up. Next, using sneak attacks, Lolidragon would get every single mob to focus its attention on her and begin running like mad around us. Doll would then toss Meatbun so Wolf-dàgē could hit Meatbun out; this way, two mobs would be lured out with their HP already reduced to half. Then, the Flaming Skeletons and I would go forth to finish them off.

By repeatedly attracting mobs, throwing the "ball", striking out, and then killing the mobs, we managed to take down enemies ranging from the level thirty-five two-headed giants to the level forty gorgons. We all earned experience points at an insanely fast rate, having been promoted three levels each on average. *Fighting in a team really is a great way to train*, I thought.

But then, one day, something happened...

As always, Lolidragon had gotten the mobs to focus their attention on her. However, as she began to dash around us, we noticed there was one particularly weird-looking leopard-headed mob which was running at an astonishingly fast speed. Even with Lolidragon's boosted agility, which was enviably high, it was still catching up with every step.

We began to worry and Wolf-dàgē attempted to hit the leopard-head mob using Meatbun. However, Meatbun's weakness was that it could only attack within a small area, and it could not reach the leopard-head. Lolidragon kept swerving, hoping to get close enough to us, but her swerving caused the leopard-head to catch up to her while we were still out of range...

We could only watch helplessly as the leopard-headed mob raked at Lolidragon's back, knocking her down. What was still more frightening, however, was that there were already a lot of mobs chasing after her. I hastily chucked Meatbun at the leopard-headed mob as I ran towards Lolidragon.

This time it struck spot on, causing the leopard-head to run toward me instead. But it was too late; the other mobs had already surrounded Lolidragon and I could only look helplessly at her terrified face before she was swarmed under...

"Lolidragon!"

A white light shot into the sky from the midst of the mobs. I was extremely upset now, since I had been unable to protect Lolidragon properly. I tried venting my frustration on the damnable leopard-headed mob, but discovered that it was... *Strong! This mob is incredibly strong!* It ruthlessly swiped at me twice, and I still couldn't manage so much as a hit. *Don't tell me...*

"Run Prince, that's a boss!" Wolf-dàgē roared.

I frantically tried to back off, but run... *Where can I run to?*

The pack of mobs that killed Lolidragon had already surrounded us. We stood back to back, knowing our deaths were imminent.

(*Second Life* did not have any scrolls of teleportation, to maintain the level of realism. There were only teleportation stations in each city that allowed players to teleport to other cities.)

Three streaks of white light shot into the sky...

Death truly couldn't be compared with any ordinary type of discomfort. When I returned to the rebirth point in Star City – the closest city to us – I was pale-faced and suppressing the urge to throw up.

Wolf-dàgē and Doll had already logged off, but I refused to log off with them – I had to find out what happened to Lolidragon first. I looked everywhere for signs of Lolidragon, but I couldn't find any trace of her. *She probably felt so awful that she logged off first!*

By then, I was feeling much better. After some thought, I decided to just walk around and wait for the others instead of logging off.

I wandered about the city, making sure to follow Lolidragon's advice: To look like first-rate merchandise by maintaining a graceful, refined aura and wearing a mesmerizing, faint smile on my lips. Sure enough, even though the whole street was watching me, no one dared to bother me, and so I was able to roam the streets happily.

Seeing a crowd gathering on an otherwise empty street, my curiosity was piqued and I decided to take a look as well. As I approached, I could hear the most beautifully poignant music coming from the heart of the crowd. Offering nearby players a polite smile, I used the opportunity to slip effortlessly into the center of the crowd as they gazed at me, dumbstruck.

As it turned out, it was a bard – a dark-haired, purple-eyed bard of the demon race – playing a *guqin*.⁴⁰ It was rare to see someone of his race and class, not to mention the fact that he

⁴⁰ **Guqin:** Written as “古琴” (prn. gǔ qín), which literally means “ancient stringed instrument”, this is a well-known type of Chinese musical instrument belonging to the zither family. It is usually associated with intelligence and grace. Fans of the ½ Prince manhua should note that the *guqin* actually looks quite different from how it was depicted in the manhua. The manhua version of Gui's *guqin* resembles a cross between a *guqin* and a harp with its curved top and fairly short body, and it is played by Gui while held vertically. Actual *guqins* tend to have longer bodies, flat ends (that is, not curved), and are usually played while placed on a flat

was holding a very unusual instrument. Then I suddenly thought of my own team and winced. *I really have no right to judge others!* In any case, he played very well and I listened attentively to that smooth and gentle sound.

Suddenly, the music stopped. I looked questioningly at the bard, only to see him staring back at me, looking surprised. It was then that I got a clear view of his face...

He was handsome enough to give my brother a run for his money, that much was clear. However, while my brother gave others the impression of a suave swordsman, this guy came off more as an unearthly beauty.

He's soooooo hot! My god, I've finally met another man whose handsomeness can make me sigh in admiration!

He, having already recovered from his surprise, had set down his instrument and was staring at me with a gentle expression, clearly captivated. Ignoring the people around us, we gazed soulfully at one another.

Thank you for sending me this opportunity, God. It looks like I don't have to choose between the two options of narcissism and incest after all!

The man slowly walked toward me, and he was still looking at me tenderly. A faint blush spread across my face as I shyly waited for him to approach. It was *very* hard to keep calm while waiting for him to walk over, however.

Finally, he stood in front of me, and in an unexpectedly bold move, he knelt down. "Fair beauty, you are truly the most exquisite person I have ever met. Your eyes are like incandescent stars, your lips would put even the loveliest rose to shame, and your skin is like the fairest snow..."

My face is red, red, red! How embarrassing! I can't help but feel shy if you say something like that in front of so many people! But hearing it feels soooo good!

"...An elegant air, oh! All of the elements of perfection are joined in you... No, you are perfection. The word 'perfect' can be used on you alone. I wonder... May I have the honor of kissing your fair, dainty hand?" He looked at me expectantly, lifting his right hand invitingly.

Ah! My face must clearly reveal that I'm intoxicated by his words. Feeling like a princess, I shyly extended my right hand to my knight. His expression was clearly one of extreme surprise and gratification. Receiving my right hand as though it were some sort of treasure, he kissed it tenderly, yet passionately. I want to remember this elegant scene forever...

surface with the strings facing up (although it is possible to play them the way Gui does in the manhua). For more information on the *guqin*, check out Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guqin>.



"Prince, what are you doing?!" I suddenly received a PM from Lolidragon.

I replied breathlessly, "Lolidragon, I met a super hottie and he seems to have fallen for me!" My face was suffused with wonder.

How fast! Lolidragon had only just logged on and had already discovered the crowd. Before replying, she ran eagerly toward the group, only to see her husband cheating on her with another man.

"...Does he know you are a girl?"

...Wait, that's right, I look like a man right now. Looking at the handsome bard, I felt a twinge of apprehension. *Don't tell me this guy is...? That's not possible, right?!* I wanted very much to cry...

And so, clinging to my last shred of hope, I opened my mouth and asked, "Umm, do you know that I'm a guy?" *God, please please, PLEASE tell me he thought I was a girl!*

The hottie stood up. He was taller than the current me who was about 175 centimeters tall - *I think he's around 180 cm tall!* Using a finger to tilt my face upwards, he looked at me with a besotted gaze and said, "Of course I know. You exude such a spirited aura, how could I mistake you for a feeble little girl?" Then he hugged me abruptly. With a blissful sigh, he added, "Men are the best. With muscles as firm as these... It feels *soooo* much better than hugging those soft, squishy girls!"

My lips lifted into a faint smile...

In a tavern...

"Prince, you really showed him no mercy! Actually using the *Nine-headed Dragon Strike* on him," Lolidragon said, laughing hard. "Your reputation will go down that way!"

I could feel my veins popping with fury. Grinding my teeth, I replied, "He should be thankful that I didn't kill him all the way back to level one! I'm totally pissed!"

To think that I'd finally found a satisfactorily good-looking guy, only for him to actually...turn out to be a GAY! Waaaaaaah!

Right after I killed that stupid bard, Lolidragon and I had received a PM from Wolf-dàgē and Doll and we'd decided to meet inside this pub. Stupid Lolidragon told Wolf-dàgē and Doll what had happened earlier and as a result they just couldn't stop laughing. *Damn it!*

In the end, Wolf-dàgē coughed twice to get Lolidragon's and Doll's attention, bringing them out of their seemingly never-ending laughter. "Okay, let's give Prince a break and analyze the reasons for our deaths earlier."

Upon hearing this, the atmosphere became heavy at once. We all paid careful attention to Wolf-dàgē's words. "That leopard-headed monster is a medium level boss. Even if we couldn't win, it shouldn't have ended so horribly in our total annihilation. I think that happened because our team was missing a vital player: a ranged class. If we'd had someone capable of ranged attacks, Lolidragon wouldn't have died in vain simply because we could not catch up to her. It also wouldn't have resulted in us being surrounded and getting completely annihilated."

Everyone couldn't help but nod their heads in agreement.

"So basically, we're missing an archer or a mage?" Lolidragon asked.

Wolf-dàgē nodded and said, "Yeah. I think it would be best to find both classes, since they both have their unique characteristics. They are equally important. Our team would be pretty much perfect if we could find an archer who could hit with high accuracy within a fairly long range, and a mage specializing in AOE⁴¹ attacks."

"Then let's go to the Adventurers' Guild to recruit new members!" Lolidragon suddenly exclaimed. "Afterwards we can also register our team."

"Good idea," said Wolf-dàgē.

I nodded in agreement. "This way we should be able to find some *normal* teammates!"

My first impression of the Adventurers' Guild was that it was big – *Huge!* - like a baseball field, with an open roof. It was full of people looking for teammates, receiving quests, selling goods, etc and was on the whole a very lively place, *but...*

Even though it was generally noisy, I was, as usual, greeted with silence wherever I went. Under everyone's gaze, we gradually arrived at the recruiting area and lifted a sign that read: "Recruiting long term leveling archers and mages, between levels thirty and forty."

⁴¹ **AOE:** This stands for "Area of Effect", a gamer term for attacks that deal damage within a certain area. Such attacks are usually quite devastatingly powerful and are used for crowd control, but their weakness is the long amount of time needed for casting. Examples of AOE spells include Meteor Shower, Blizzard, and Earthquake (such skills may have different names in different games).

We were pleased at everyone staring at our sign, secretly thinking it wouldn't be long until we found a comrade.

It really was fast. After ten seconds, we looked on helplessly as a few thousand people moved toward us. The females were all shouting, "I want to join, hottie," or "Handsome, pick me!", while all the males were saying, "I'm coming, cutie!" or "Take me, gorgeous!"

Lolidragon, the cute and angelic Doll, and I all turned white. I was the first to hide behind Wolf-dàgē's back. Lolidragon followed suit second, and Doll last. The current situation was pretty much like a game of "The Eagle and the Mother Hen".⁴²

"Line up!" Wolf-dàgē bellowed in his loud, ringing voice.

The results were excellent. After Wolf-dàgē bellowed, the once-scary mob froze for three seconds. After another ten seconds, an army – with soldiers marching ten abreast – appeared. *Dàgē, it's really a waste of talent that you aren't a general.*

We placed all our trust in Wolf-dàgē and handed our decision-making power over to him. Lolidragon, Doll, and I then took our *guazi*⁴³ and beverages out and, setting up shop to one side, ate away.

After a long time...

How long? Long enough for all three of us to finish eating our guazi, buy a few more bags of them, leisurely go shopping, and then eat dinner...as well as to order take out for Wolf-dàgē. During this time I also logged off to cook, flipped through some manhua, turned on the television, and watched Naruto. Then I logged on again and started to eat Lolidragon's newly purchased guazi...

"All right, I guess these people will do!" Wolf-dàgē said, having finally finished his selection.

We looked up, and up, and up. Finally Lolidragon said in a shaking voice, "Dàgē, we're trying to form a party, not an army!" *There are at least two or three hundred in this sea of people!*

⁴² **"The Eagle and the Mother Hen" game:** A children's game in a number of Asian countries, with variations. The game requires three or more players, with one player as the "Eagle", one as the "Mother Hen" and the others as the "Chicks". The chicks line up behind the mother hen and hang onto the person in front of them while the Eagle tries to catch the chicks by touching them. Once the mother hen loses all her chicks, the game is over.

⁴³ **Guazi:** Written as "瓜子" (prn. guā zǐ) in Chinese, *guazi* are a curious sort of snack that's especially popular during the Chinese New Year and are actually seeds that have been salted and dried. There are many types, including sunflower seeds, watermelon seeds, winter melon seeds, and pumpkin seeds. Each seed is encased in a hard shell (its shape would resemble a flattened almond), and you have to bite them very carefully to get the seeds to crack open without crushing the "meat" within. They are much tougher to eat than peanuts.

Wolf-dàgē scratched his gray fur. “It couldn’t be helped. These people all fit the qualifications; they’re all pretty good.”

I beckoned Lolidragon over and whispered in her ear. I could have done this via the personal messaging system, but it couldn’t be helped; it was human habit! “Lolidragon, I think most of these people are here for us. Why don’t we tell them about our relationship?”

I cleared my throat and said, “Everyone, we must clarify something first. This beautiful woman and I are already married. That is why...” Before I could even finish, around eighty percent of the players had already disappeared.

We could hear lots of grumbling going on below. “Why didn’t they say so sooner?! Making me wait for so long...”

“Pisses me off, such a beautiful girl is already taken!”

“Now I can’t get that hottie to be my husband...”

But the people who stayed were saying something along the lines of, “At least there’s still that cute angel girl....”

Lolidragon and I looked toward the youthful and naïve Doll. *No way!* So I opened my mouth again, “Everyone, this angel race girl is my little sister. Anyone who tries to get close to her had better....” Before I could finish, everyone had left.

“What are we going to do now?” I asked.

“These people... We don’t want them anyway!” said Lolidragon.

“Might as well go level up and regain those levels from before,” Wolf-dàgē responded.

Biting her index finger, Doll tilted her head with a look of confusion.

Our party began to train seriously in the barren land of the zombies. We came to this zombie-infested land specifically, in order to avoid another conclusion as disastrous as the last time. Zombies were strange mobs that moved slowly, but dealt very heavy blows. You could see Lolidragon walking around, occasionally dozing off...

All of a sudden, however, a particularly fast zombie charged toward Lolidragon. *It can’t be...!*

“Lolidragon, run! That’s the Zombie King!” Wolf-dàgē’s cry woke Lolidragon, who had nearly been asleep. She looked back at the Zombie King, frightened, and was not able to hold back a loud scream for help as she ran away wildly.

Damn it! I can't let Lolidragon die again. Why did the Zombie King have to appear right when Lolidragon is furthest away from us? I can't catch up...!

"Hang in there, Lolidragon!" I shouted as I ran.

This time, Lolidragon didn't dare to swerve around the corner. She ran straight ahead, not allowing the Zombie King to gain on her. However, we weren't able to catch up with her speed either.

As I watched Lolidragon run further and further away, I began to panic. *We should've recruited an archer, no matter what!*

Just when we were about to give up hope, I heard a voice behind me.

"*Supersonic Soul-chasing Arrow.*" The melodious and very familiar voice was accompanied by the sound of music.

A translucent arrow streaked toward the Zombie King, causing it to change paths and charge toward us.

I turned around to discover that stupid black-haired, purple-eyed demon bard. He looked at me, smiling, and said, "You'll have to help me block it, I'm afraid. I am just a frail bard, after all."

"And if I refuse?" I told him coldly.

There was a helpless smile on his handsome face. "Then... I shall die at your hands again. But that's fine; let it be revenge for kissing your hand."

Hey! I gestured to Wolf-dàgē and Doll. They nodded in understanding and took Meatbun out, getting into a striking position. I drew my sword and inched closer to the already approaching Zombie King.

No wonder it's called a Zombie King – its agility and strength are all top class. It even has a considerable amount of HP. I'd already tried my "*Nine-headed Dragon Strike*" twice, but most of my attacks had been blocked because my agility was no match for the Zombie King's.

Two of Doll's Flaming Skeletons had already been destroyed, but I was grateful for them. If it hadn't been for the Flaming Skeletons blocking most of the attacks, I would long since have been pounded into the ground.

Though only a mid-ranked boss, the Zombie King boss's agility and strength all greatly exceeded mine. *As for me, I'm used to finding and attacking a mob's weak points rather*

than “fighting it out”, therefore I’m not fighting at my peak... I’m currently only scraping by thanks to the Flaming Skeletons and Wolf-dàgē’s healing.

Then, a beautiful voice began to sing, accompanied by the strumming of a *guqin*. “*Sheng-ge Entrancement Technique*,” sang the bard, triggering the ability.⁴⁴

I noticed a huge decrease in the Zombie King’s agility as it fell under the influence of the music. I also felt the tension in my body alleviate, finally allowing me to concentrate on attacking its weak point – its neck – rather than struggle to defend myself.

Under my persistent attacks on its neck and joints, the Zombie King’s HP slowly began to decrease. Around this time, Lolidragon also came back to join the fight. With her super high agility, she helped to divert the Zombie King’s attention, making it even easier for me.

“*Nine-headed Dragon Strike!*” After three of Lolidragon’s *Fatal Blows* plus three of my *Nine-headed Dragon Strikes*, the Zombie King was finally pushed to its limit. It exploded into a staff, two gems, and some materials that could be used to make high level weapons or armor.

We identified the staff, discovering that it was a growing-type magical staff with light-type damage – the Light of Glory. We gave the wand to Wolf-dàgē and decided to split the rest in the city.

“Let’s go! We need to get back to leveling up,” I urged everyone, but...

“Would you be interested in joining our team?”

Noooo! Wolf-dàgē, can you not see me desperately trying to ignore him? Now you’re even inviting him to join our team!

“Were you the one who saved me? Thank you, thank you very much.” Lolidragon was desperately trying to fight back laughter.

The bard gave me a brief but passionate look. “I would very much like to join your team.”

“No way! I object!” I yelled frantically.

Wolf-dàgē cocked a brow and said, “You saw it too, Prince. He...what’s your name?” He turned to ask the bard.

⁴⁴ **Sheng-ge Entrancement Technique:** “Sheng-ge” is written as “笙歌” (*prn. shēng gē*). The first character, “shēng”, refers to a Chinese woodwind musical instrument made of reed. The second character, “gē”, means “song”, thus “shēng gē” refers to a song that played using a *shēng*. Do note that Gui isn’t actually using a *shēng*. For more information on the *sheng*, check out Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheng_\(instrument\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheng_(instrument)).

The bard gave a bow and said, “My name is Guiliastes.”

“Guiliastes can not only attack from afar, but he can also use support-type magic. He would make an excellent teammate.”

“That’s right Prince, just accept him!” Lolidragon said in a falsely earnest tone.

“No, Lolidragon,” I begged. “Didn’t you say we were finding teammates to protect my virtue? How could you let a pervert in now?!”

Lolidragon giggled but immediately feigned a contemplative look. “You’re right. Then how about this: Guiliastes, you have to swear not to do anything unspeakable to Prince.”

Guiliastes revealed a horror-stricken face. “Please do not misunderstand. Guiliastes would *never* try to perform any profane acts on his beautiful and noble Highness.” He gazed at me warmly again. *Scary!* “His beautiful and noble Highness should only be looked at, not touched.”

I looked toward my last helper, Doll, with an expression of desperate pleading.

“Sure, the more the merrier!” Doll encouraged happily.

Thus, under the circumstance of four votes for and one against, we now had a new addition to our team: Guiliastes, a gay demon bard.

“Gui-whatever, I’m warning you, if you try to...do something to me, I will make you pay.” I leveled my dao at his face.

“My beloved Highness, if you cannot remember Guiliastes’ name, then please call me by my nickname,” Guiliastes told me tenderly.

“What’s your nickname? It would be so tiring to call you by your full name all the time,” Lolidragon said.

He gave Lolidragon a small smile and then turned his head to look affectionately at me. “Just call me Gui.”

• Chapter 5 •

Sworn Enemies

I hacked, I slashed, I chopped N number of times. I furiously vented all my frustration on the mobs, even as I thought to myself, *What the hell! Not only did Lolidragon abandon me, even Wolf-dàgē turned his back on me, and Doll! Actually saying stuff about how it was more fun with more people...!*

Damn Gui, stupid Gui, stinking Gui! Gazing at me with that perverted look from day to night! My back feels as if a hole's about to be burnt through it!

I turned around and glared savagely at that damn homo.

Unbelievably enough, Gui, seeing that I had turned about and was glaring at him, actually started waving at me enthusiastically, and...

And even blowing me a kiss! I'm dodging it! I hurriedly turned away and went back to fighting mobs, so as to avoid receiving any more of those blown kisses with Gui's questionable intentions.

"Sigh! His noble and beautiful Highness really is shy," Gui said, looking at Prince – who was looking for more mobs to vent his frustration on – with an infatuated expression on his handsome face.

...Are you sure that he's SHY!? thought the others.

After finishing off the last mob that Lolidragon had lured over, the two of us received a PM from Wolf-dàgē. We rejoined the others and listened quietly as Wolf-dàgē gave us a briefing.

“I think that with our party’s current make-up – a level forty priest, a level forty warrior, a level thirty-nine thief, a level thirty-seven necromancer, and a level forty bard – we should be able to train in areas with even tougher mobs,” Wolf-dàgē said critically. “I believe that Raging Dragons’ Valley will suit our purpose nicely. There, we’ll be able to find small dragons that deal different types of elemental damage. There are also high-level magical beasts. Those mobs yield quite a lot of experience and frequently drop rare items, which in turn would greatly boost our overall combat strength.

“In addition, the Adventurers’ Guild offers quests that require players to collect dragon hide, dragon bones, and dragon tendons. Rewards include an increase in reputation, money, and even extra experience points.

“But all of that is pretty inconsequential. The most important thing is...” Wolf-dàgē’s expression became grave.

“Is...what?” we asked, and each of us gulped nervously.

“I’ve heard that dragon XXs work wonders...”

“Wolf-dàgē...?” I could hardly believe my ears, hearing the straight-laced Wolf-dàgē saying something like that.

“...And can be sold for one gold apiece.”

“Right then! Let’s go kill some dragons!” Burning with enthusiasm, I gave an experimental swing of my blade, my eyes having turned into money signs.

We decided to head over to the Adventurers’ Guild first to register our party and to take on all the dragon-related quests. It was at this point, however, that we encountered a *huge* problem...

“For our party’s name, I think we should go with ‘Dragon Slayers’. It sounds more impressive,” said Wolf-dàgē.

“That’s no good, it sounds too coarse. ‘Wild Roses Team’ sounds better.” Lolidragon became engrossed in a fantasy of wild roses...

Doll exclaimed with excitement, “Let’s call ourselves ‘Sailor Team!’”

...I was suddenly confronted with the image of Wolf-dàgē proclaiming himself to be from *Sailor Team*...

“We should be called ‘Noble Prince Team’.”

I struck out with my right fist, squarely hitting the frail-bodied bard and sending him to the ground. He lay there with stars circling about his head.

“How about, ‘The Legend of Wild Wolf Team’?” Wolf-dàgē asked, his brow creased with thought.

“Nah, ‘Alluringly Aromatic Herbs Team’!” Lolidragon wasn’t about to give up.

“‘Love and Justice Fight-e-rs!’” Doll hollered.

“‘The Wildcats’...”

“‘The Lilies’...”

“‘Cute Doll Team’...”

Watching the three of them as they argued, I scratched my face and muttered, “Looks like the only thing we can be called is ‘weird’...”

All three of them instantly turned to stare at me. In unison, they demanded, “What did you just say?”

A bit of sweat ran down the back of my neck. “I...”

In the end, we decided on a name for our party – Odd Squad.⁴⁵ *It may seem like a nonsensical name at first glance, but it actually does make sense if you read it as ‘Fēi, Cháng Dui’ and not ‘Fēi Cháng, Dui’.*⁴⁶

Upon reaching Raging Dragons’ Valley, we spent some time observing the speed of the small dragons. After noting that they were quite a bit slower than Lolidragon, especially

⁴⁵ **Odd Squad:** Written in Chinese as “非常队” (*prn. fēi cháng duì*).

⁴⁶ **‘Fēi, Cháng Dui’ ... ‘Fēi Cháng, Dui’:** Both are written and pronounced as “非常队” (*prn. fēi cháng duì*), but their meanings are significantly different, with the former meaning “Not, Normal Squad” and the latter meaning “Very, Squad” (which is nonsensical). The reason for the difference is because the same Chinese characters, when grouped differently, have different meanings.

In the first one, “*fēi*” stands on its own, and means “not”, while “*cháng*” (which means “regular” or “normal”) is grouped with “*duì*”, which means “squad”, hence the result is “not, normal squad”, or “Odd Squad”. In the second version, “*fēi*” and “*cháng*” have been grouped together and together they actually mean “very” or “extreme”, hence “Very, Squad”. Although this is the incorrect interpretation of Odd Squad’s name, most of the other players in Second Life believed this to be Odd Squad’s name initially (hence everybody thought they were weird).

with Gui's speed debuff⁴⁷ on them, it was decided that we would employ the usual strategy to fight them.

"Meatbun, Aroma Release." I absolutely adore this ability of Meatbun's. There's just no knowing how much time we've managed to save on looking for mobs. And its range has increased to 250 meters!

After a while, the earth began to tremble beneath our feet. A cloud of dust could be seen rising in the distance, as though something was stampeding towards us... All of a sudden, we found ourselves looking at an extremely bizarre picture: Dozens of dragons, each one approximately three meters tall, surrounding a single meat bun. *That's odd; I don't think anybody's ever told me that dragons love to eat meat buns.*

My eyes widened. "L-Lolidragon, can you handle it? It sort of looks like...there are way too many mobs!"

Looking somewhat taken aback, Lolidragon swallowed...and then promptly burst out laughing. "Don't worry! I swear, on the reputation of the world's greatest thief, that I can handle it."

The world's greatest thief? What use is there in swearing on somebody else's reputation?

"Doll, summon your Flame-armored Skeletons. Gui, use your *Sheng-ge Entrancement Technique* and have your *Supersonic Soul-chasing Arrow* at the ready, just in case. Also, use your *Flurry of Musical Notes*⁴⁸ whenever you can, to help Prince out. Prince... Draw your sword and give me the sheath," Wolf-dàgē instructed, even as he buffed Lolidragon and I.

All was ready. "Be careful, Lolidragon."

We sent Lolidragon off with expressions that seemed to say, "The hero leaves and will never return!" *Ah, the piercing winds...*⁴⁹

⁴⁷ **Debuff:** A debuff is the opposite of a buff – while it lasts, it hampers the target in some way, such as by lower agility or strength (as opposed to increasing them).

⁴⁸ **Flurry of Musical Notes:** In Chinese, this is written as “群音乱舞” (*prn. qún yīng luàn wǔ*) – the mental image it provokes is something like a flock of ducks scattering in panic (but substitute the ducks with musical notes). This may be a pun on the phrase “群莺乱舞” (*prn. qún yīng luàn wǔ*, pronunciation is exactly the same), which means a gathering of unchaste women. The character “莺” (*prn. yīng*) here refers to a type of bird, but is also used when referring to prostitutes. The skill appears to be an offensive-type spell, but this is not clearly stated.

⁴⁹ **"The hero leaves, and will never return!" ...Ah, the piercing winds:** This is a reference to Jing Ke (荆軻, *prn. jīng kē*), an assassin who lived during the Warring States Period. He was sent by Yan Dan (燕丹, *prn. yàn dān*), crown prince of Yan, to assassinate Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇, *prn. qín shǐ huáng*), emperor of Qin.

I watched as Lolidragon crept up on one of the dragons noiselessly and then, as though in defiance of Death, viciously stabbed the dragon in the butt.

Here I should mention that the reason why Lolidragon stabbed the dragon in the butt was because she was so short that the highest she could reach was the dragon's behind. It had absolutely nothing to do with her personal preferences.

Then Lolidragon began to sprint frantically, her speed faster than ever before.

"Wow, she's so fast that she's practically flying," I remarked, sighing in admiration. Lolidragon was so quick that by the time Wolf-dàgē brought Meatbun back, he was completely out of range and unable to land an attack using *Double Kill*.

"*Supersonic Soul-chasing Arrow.*" Strumming his *guqin*, Gui fired two consecutive arrows. He lured two dragons back before continuing to play his *Sheng-ge Entrancement Technique*.

Charging alongside the Flame-armored Skeletons, I proceeded to engage one of the dragons while the skeletons held the others off.

As I fought, I kept a lookout for any signs of weakness in my opponent. Although it initially appeared as though the dragon had no weak point, I soon realized that despite their strong attack power, heavy defense, and considerable speed, dragons had one major shortcoming. That was...their paws were too short.

As the dragon could rarely attack me with its paws, I needed only to watch out for its tail, and dodge whenever it lunged toward me. That way I could slowly whittle away at its health. Even if I took a couple of blows, Wolf-dàgē would be there to heal me, so there wasn't anything to be afraid of.

Doll was having a bit more trouble with her Flame-armored Skeletons. As the Flame-armored Skeletons had no intelligence to speak of, their skill at dodging and evading was certainly below mine, and so they took quite a number of hits. Luckily for us, they were Rank 4 minions with high defense and health, as well as strong attack power. Thus, they were able to get by with Doll's *Black Restoration Spell*.

In addition, there was Wolf-dàgē's ranged attack and Meatbun's *Double Kill*, which lowered the dragons' health considerably...

According to ancient records, Jing Ke supposedly came up with this impromptu poem as he bade farewell to his friends on the banks of the river Yi – “风潇潇兮，易水寒，壮士一去兮不复返！” (prn. fēng xiāo xiāo xí, yì shuǐ hán, zhuàng shì yì qù xí bù fù fǎn), which can be translated as, “The piercing winds, ah, the freezing waters of the river Yi, the hero leaves, and he will never return!” So in the same sense, Prince and the others are (melodramatically) bidding Lolidragon farewell.

Fine! Gui also frequently used *Flurry of Musical Notes* to help me out, so he wasn't completely useless...

At long last, the dragon before me collapsed. I rejoiced, *Dragon XXs are worth one gold apiece...wahahaha!* Before Gui lured back yet another dragon, I decided to take the opportunity to satisfy my curiosity by checking to see if dragon XXs looked anything like a gold coin.

...It's not there! It's not there! Why isn't there a XX on this dragon? Oh, my gold coin, where are you?

"Wolf-dàgē, why isn't there a XX on this dragon? You said they had..." I asked Wolf-dàgē in a pitiful tone.

"Prince, you really..." *You really want to eat it? Seriously, at least don't be so obvious about it!* Wolf thought as he examined the dragon's corpse. "Prince, this is a female, so it doesn't have one." Wolf-dàgē gave me a pat on the back. "Don't worry; we'll definitely give you any that we come across."

That's right, look at how scrawny Prince is. We really should give him a tonic... Besides, that aspect of a man's life is very important – mustn't let any problems develop! Hmm, it would probably help if we gave Prince a dragon's XX then, Ugly Wolf thought and his contemplation drifted to how it should be served. *Stir-fried dragon's XX, dragon's XX braised in wine, dragon's XX soup...*⁵⁰

"Really? That's great!" *My gold coin, hohoho! I want to go for some afternoon tea!* I thought happily.

"Noble Highness, save meeeeeee!" Gui was running all over the place like a chicken with its head cut off, and there was a dragon – the one that he had just lured back with his *Supersonic Soul-chasing Arrow* – snapping at his backside. Although I was sorely tempted to ignore his plight... *Sigh!* In the end, I still hefted my Black Dao and took down the dragon.

Through our combined efforts, we managed to gradually reduce the number of dragons from several dozen to zero. As expected, since the dragons were pretty tough mobs, the amount of experience points that they yielded was incredibly high. Wolf-dàgē, whose level was the highest in our group, leveled up once, while Doll, whose level was the lowest, leveled up twice. However...

⁵⁰ **Dragon's XX:** When it comes to herbs and tonics, there are all kinds of weird Chinese recipes involving all kinds of weird ingredients, such as monkey brains. In this case, dragon's XX is basically a cure for impotency (those game developers in Second Life must have been very bored). Interestingly enough, the word used here for "XX" actually means "whip".

"Huff...huff..." Lolidragon lay sprawled out on the ground in a most unladylike fashion. She was wheezing heavily and was unable to so much as utter a word.

I was no better off. I was weary to the bone after fighting all those dragons one after another with no respite. Every muscle in my right arm ached, protesting even the slightest movement. My legs were as weak as jelly.

Wolf-dàgē was so worn out from his "game" of baseball that he had pitched forward and was all but lying on the ground. Doll's mouth was as dry as a drought-stricken country from chanting the incantation for her *Black Restoration Spell*. As for Gui, his fingers had cramped up into exceedingly contorted positions. *Looks like he'll have to eat straight from his plate like a dog tonight!*

In this condition, the members of Odd Squad lay sprawled on the ground. We didn't have the energy to sort out the dragon cadavers, much less skin them or remove their tendons and bones... And yet, all I could think about was my dragon XXs and gold coins. Thus, summoning the rest of my strength, I crawled, and crawled, and crawled to the nearest dead dragon...

Waaah! Why is it yet another female? Tears pooled in the corners of my eyes. *My afternoon tea...*

"Does the his noble highness really like dragon XXs that much?" Gui asked, looking at me with compassion. "Come, let Gui serve you!" He then ran off towards a random dragon and began to clean it up.

Gui... It was the first time I'd felt that grateful towards him – the first time that he didn't say something that made me want to thrash him. I watched, wide-eyed, as Gui sliced something off from the dragon before speedily taking a pot out and getting a fire going. He then threw that thing into the pot, and started adding various condiments.

"...Gui, what are you doing?" I asked, my voice trembling.

"Beautiful Highness, it'll just be a bit longer before the dragon XX soup is done!" Gui replied, even as he tasted the soup to check if it was salty enough.

"..."

When a person has been infuriated to the extreme, they possess limitless drive. Before, I had never imagined myself capable of the speed at which I sprinted towards Gui. Once I reached him, I knocked him aside with a flying kick. Fingers shaking, I grabbed the pot of dragon XX soup.

"M-my gold co-o-in! My afternoon tea!" I wailed.

I stomped, stomped and stomped on Gui the Floor Mat, occasionally adding an Exploding Punch⁵¹ as well...

“HAHAHA...huff...huff...HAHA!” Lolidragon laughed manically between gasps. *Prince? Drink dragon’s XX soup? Hahahahaha!*

So Prince wasn’t thinking about eating dragon’s XX after all! Wolf-dàgē realized. Good thing Gui acted first. Otherwise, I’d have served the dragon’s XX up, and...

“What’s a dragon’s whip?⁵² Do dragons use whips?” Doll asked comprehendingly. With a worried look at Gui – who was getting thrashed by me – she added, “Is Gui-gēge going to die?”

“No, he’s not. Don’t worry, I’ll heal him up later,” Wolf-dàgē consoled. Secretly, he thought, *It might actually be a bit better for Gui to die and return to the rebirth point...*

After a long while, I was finally tired from beating Gui up. Ordering him to clean up all of the dragons, I looked at all the XXs...

Embarrassed? All that’s in front of me are gold coins and the fragrance of tea. What’s there to be embarrassed about? Wahahahaha!

“Hold up there, you people.” It was a woman’s voice; her tone was arrogant.

I felt a twinge of panic. *Don’t tell me it’s yet another “The way is mine to cut...with the hottie you must part” highwaywoman!* Glancing at Gui, I thought, *Perhaps I should sell him to the highwaywoman?!*

As for Gui... Although his expression was still as besotted as ever, a shiver suddenly ran down his spine. *Odd, has the weather turned chilly?* He glanced at the sky.

I turned around and looked, only to see an extremely cool-looking human girl standing not too far away from us. Behind her stood another four players of different races and classes – clearly they were a team.

A band of highwaymen? That can’t be, right!?

Now on my guard, I looked coldly at that human girl with her “manly” cool. I decided to scare her off – or at least to get her to kidnap Gui instead of me. I deliberately struck a pose with my legs apart, my back slouched, and my hands on my hips. Tapping my left foot impatiently, I spoke in the rudest tone that I could manage.

⁵¹ **Exploding Punch:** Just a generic attack name. Similarly named moves appear in a wide number of comics and video games, including *King of Fighters*.

⁵² **Whip:** In case you didn’t read footnote 50, the word used for “XX” in “Dragon’s XX” actually means “whip”.



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“Whaaat now! Whada’ya want, girlie?”

“Prince, what on earth are you doing?” Lolidragon asked me on party chat. She sounded utterly astonished.

“I’m pretending to be a gangster! How does it look?”

“...You look like anything BUT a gangster.”

Although Lolidragon’s reaction took some of the wind out of my sails, the cool-looking girl facing me was clearly furious. In fact, she was infuriated to the point where you could almost see her blazing with flames. *Waaah! So scary! Looks like I better not pretend to be a gangster any longer.*

“What. Did. You. Just. Say?” she asked through gritted teeth.

I was so terrified that I straightened up and stood properly. With a nervous gulp, I replied, “N-nothing much. I just wanted to ask you if anything was the matter, miss.”

“WHAT did you say?!”

Waaah! Why are the flames of her anger even hotter and brighter than before???

Question marks hung in the air over my head. I decided – for safety’s sake – that I’d better put on my “first-rate merchandise,” princely look. Smiling my most charming, most gracious smile, I asked, “Beautiful lady, what would you like to command me to do?”

However, the “beautiful lady” in question actually cussed. (“F*** YOU!” was what she yelled.) Then, she promptly kicked me...using a leg-type move commonly known as “a kick in the nuts.”

The rest of my party was stunned. *To think that a girl would actually be willing to kick the Ultra-Gorgeous Prince’s XX!* Lolidragon in particular was so flabbergasted that her jaw had nearly fallen off.

“Uhn!” Caught off guard, I had been kicked squarely in the nuts. *IT HURTS!* I really wanted to use my hands to protect my XX and then hop all over the place in order to relieve the pain. That, however, was out of the question. My feminine reserve told me that a girl couldn’t just shield her XX with her hands in the presence of strangers. *Besides, do girls even have XXs to shield?*

Still, *the pain!* Unable to bear it, I curled up in agony, kneeling on the ground with my head hanging low. I could feel the tears trickling down my face...

"Prince..." Gui looked at me helplessly, clearly at a loss as to what to do. Then, he stood up and faced the cool-looking girl. His gaze was merciless and as cold as ice, and his entire person radiated a freezing chill. Even Lolidragon and Ugly Wolf – who had been about to respond swiftly to the affront – were dumbfounded. *Have they ever seen Gui looking this cold?*

Pak! Gui gave the cool-looking girl a vicious slap, knocking her to the ground. He then pinned her forcefully to the earth with his right foot, and spoke in a bitingly cold tone. "I don't know how Prince might have offended you, but *nobody* should ever treat him like that."

Immediately, the girl's teammates rushed over. The dark elf standing at the head of the group drew his longsword, leveling it at Gui. "Release him."

Seeing the situation, Lolidragon drew her daggers. Wolf-dàgē picked Meatbun up from the floor, clutching his Light of Glory tightly. Doll summoned her Flame-armored Skeletons and dashed to my side. "Prince-gēge, are you all right?" she asked urgently in a voice filled with concern.

At that moment, both parties immediately drew their weapons and took aim at their opponents. The situation was becoming critical and since I was the only warrior on our side, I hurriedly wiped my tears away. Standing up with red-rimmed eyes, I drew out my level 20 Black Dao, which now had an attack power of 65.

I looked at the girl, who was still pinned to the ground by Gui, with hatred and a desire for vengeance. *To think that she actually made me go through the worst pain that a guy could ever experience... Damn her!*

Still, there was one thing that puzzled me. "Why did you kick me? What did I say wrong?"

The girl looked at me, infuriated. "F*** you! You're an air-headed sissy who can't distinguish male from female! You couldn't even tell that I'm a guy?! Calling me "girlie, girlie" like a dumbass...!" He then turned to glare at Gui, and began to cuss again. "Let me go!"

Gui, however, merely increased the pressure of his foot, and spoke in an unrelenting tone. "How dare you call Prince an air-headed sissy? Why don't you look at yourself first – what sort of guy would actually kick another guy in the nuts? As for letting you go... When you turn into a pillar of white light, I'll let you go."

...A guy? I was flabbergasted. I then closely examined the "girl" as he lay on the floor. No matter how I looked at him, I really couldn't see how he was in any way like a guy, with the exception of his level brows. His face was even heart-shaped, his eyes were framed with long lashes, and his physique was slender. Plus, he was dressed in a mage's robes, so I couldn't tell if he had a chest or not...

“Let go of Ming Huang.” This time, the dark elf dashed forward. With a cry of “*Sword of the Flawless Circle*”, the longsword in his hand pierced Gui mercilessly from five different directions.

<Gui HP -500, 1000/1500>

“Urgh!” Gui bit back a cry of pain even as he was flung onto his back by the impact.

Not having expected that the opponent would actually attack when he said so, I was completely unprepared to catch Gui as he fell. I kneeled down hurriedly to take a look at Gui’s injuries. Wolf-dàgē rushed over as well, casting a healing spell to help Gui recover his health.

With Gui’s foot no longer resting on him, Ming Huang immediately got to his feet. Casting a poisonous look at Gui, he began to chant an incantation. “*Elf of lightning...*”

Hearing the words of his incantation, Lolidragon shouted, “Prince, stop him, quick! Lightning magic is exceptionally powerful. At this rate, Gui will be killed!”

As soon as I heard Lolidragon’s warning, I raised my blade and charged towards Ming Huang, thinking to run him through so as to prevent him from chanting any further. However, the longsword-wielding dark elf immediately blocked my path.

I swung my dao at the dark elf, my heart gripped by anxiety. He did not retreat an inch, countering me with an attack of his own instead. The two of us exchanged blow after blow, attacking and defending in turn, but I was actually frantic by then.

“...*Divine Lightning Strike!*” Ming Huang had finally finished the incantation, and a bolt of lightning struck Gui.

“A-argh...urgh,” Gui cried out, his voice laced with pain. Meanwhile, Wolf-dàgē continued to cast his healing magic ceaselessly, hoping to restore some of Gui’s HP in time.

<Guiliastes’s HP 350/1500>

At least he’s still alive, I thought.

Just as I turned my head to spare a concerned glance for Gui, however, the dark elf’s longsword pierced me twice. Somewhat pissed off, I resolved not to be distracted again and began to focus my attention on fighting the dark elf.

“*Twin Shot!*” The enemy’s elf archer actually dared to take the opportunity to shoot at the already injured Gui. I ignored the dark elf’s blade and began dashing towards Gui. *Still, how can anyone hope to be faster than an arrow?*

“Skeletons, protect Gui-gēgē.” Luckily for us, Doll was right beside Gui, and she instantly directed her skeletons to stand in front of Gui, blocking any incoming attacks.

Seeing how things were, I was deeply relieved – to the point where I actually forgot that there was an enemy behind me. The dark elf cried out, “*Sword of the Flawless Circle*,” and brought his blade down on my back.

<Prince’s HP 2350/3000>

“Uhn...” I winced.

“*Prince!*” My teammates shouted, clearly worried. Doll even directed three of her skeletons to come and support me. Retreating as the Flame-armored Skeletons shielded me, I rejoined Odd Squad and let Wolf-dàgē heal me.

My wounds weren’t heavy, so Wolf-dàgē only had to use a medium heal to restore me to max HP. However, when I looked at Gui – his expression twisted as he fought to endure to pain – a killing intent rose in my heart. I stood slowly, and when I spoke to Ming Huang, my voice was soft – quiet like the lull before a storm.

“I admit that mistaking you for a girl was my fault, but you were in the wrong for injuring me before even clarifying things. Gui did slap you, but he had no intention of killing you. Now you want to take his life? Aren’t you going overboard?”

“Overboard? For stepping on me as he did, I am *only* asking for his worthless life,” Ming Huang replied coolly.

I took a deep breath, struggling to contain my rising ire. Using party chat, I asked the rest of the team, “Guys, what shall we do?”

“Yo! The other party’s been all courtesy; how can we not reciprocate?” Lolidragon said acerbically.

“*RO-O-AR!* Those who hurt my teammates should die!” Wolf-dàgē bellowed.

“They’re too much! First poor Gui-gēgē, and now they’ve hurt Prince-gēgē as well! For love and justice, Doll shall punish them!” Doll replied, her tone conveying her indignation.

“Dàgē, hurry and heal me! I will repay them for the hurt they’ve caused Prince,” Gui said, his face still pale as a sheet.

I smiled faintly.

“Odd Squad, five team members. Prince, warrior. Lolidragon, thief. Ugly Wolf, priest. Doll, necromancer. Guiiastes, bard. Kindly report your names,” I said coldly.

With a “Hmph!”, Ming Huang replied, “Dark Emperor, five team members. Ming Huang, mage (human). Wicked, warrior (dark elf). Ambusher, archer (elf). Black Lily, priest (angel). Playboy Lord, thief (human).”

A *very well-balanced team composition...ahem!* Shaking off that sense of respect, I silently listened as Wolf-dàgē gave his instructions over party chat.

“Well... There’s not much to say. Prince will go against Wicked, Lolidragon against Playboy Lord. Gui, your task is to interfere with Ambusher. Make sure he doesn’t get the chance to shoot at anyone on our side! You’ll have to protect Doll and Lolidragon in particular...”

“Doll, your task is very important. Make sure that the enemy mage doesn’t have the chance to harm anyone from our team. Otherwise, the situation will be critical. Don’t worry; I’ll be there to help you.”

The two parties all stood quietly facing each other, except for the priests, who were busy buffing their teammates up.

The situation had quickly become volatile as our battle fury was ignited. Finally, I moved, hefting my Black Dao and leveling it challengingly at Wicked, who had managed to score on me twice earlier. Wicked too, held his longsword at the ready.

“*Nine-headed Dragon Strike,*” I said as I rushed forward.

“*Flawless Frenzied Blade-Dance.*” Wicked too, came charging in.

My dao and his longsword met and there was the ringing sound of metal clashing against metal as my *Nine-headed Dragon Strike* and Wicked’s *Flawless Frenzied Blade-Dance* were blocked by one another. With neither having been successfully executed, we both quickly guessed that the other was also a warrior skilled in swift yet powerful attacks.

Our blades flashed as we continued our fight, yet neither of us could overpower the other.

As Wicked and I commenced our attacks, the others also began to enter combat. Lolidragon was up against Playboy Lord. He attempted one attack after another on Lolidragon, but none of them landed. Her agility was clearly way above Playboy Lord’s. I was worried, however, since that probably meant that his strength was greater than hers.

Luckily, Lolidragon seemed to have arrived at the same conclusion. Realizing that Playboy Lord had pumped his skill points into strength, she avoided going head-to-head with him. Instead, she chose to dodge and evade his attacks, waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

Doll had directed two of her Flame-armored Skeletons to interrupt Ming Huang's spell-casting, while keeping two skeletons at hand to protect her, Ugly Wolf, and Gui. I had engaged Wicked, their only warrior, in combat. Thus, their mage – with no warrior to protect him – could only cast weak spells to defend against the skeletons. Things were to our advantage here.

As Doll was controlling the skeletons, their archer – Ambusher – thought to take her down. At first, he fired arrows like mad, but Doll was shielded by her skeletons. Moreover, Gui was anything but idle all this while. Supremely pissed off, he alternated between drinking mana potions like plain water and casting *Supersonic Soul-chasing Arrow* over and over again like a maniac, giving Ming Huang a royal thrashing.

Ming Huang, in turn, was so terrified that he could only hide behind Ambusher and cast defensive spells. Although Ambusher had Ming Huang's defensive spells to protect him from Gui's attacks, Doll's skeletons were also eyeing him hungrily from the side. Facing two Flame-armored Skeletons, Ambusher could only fire *Twin Shot* like a man possessed in order to block their attacks.

Since Gui's attacks were blocked by Ming Huang's *Impenetrable Wall*, he'd immediately switched to playing *Sheng-ge Entrancement Technique* in order to support Lolidragon and I. Once Ming Huang dropped the *Impenetrable Wall* in order to cast offensive spells, however, Gui would immediately attack Ming Huang and Ambusher, casting *Flurry of Musical Notes* continuously.

As for Wolf-dàgē, his role was the same as the enemy priest's: to stand to one side and heal any injured party members.

With Gui's occasional *Sheng-ge Entrancement Technique*, my speed instantly surpassed Wicked's. He began to retreat step by step, his body covered with numerous wounds, leaving their priest Black Lily flustered as she attempted to heal him. Lolidragon too, benefitted from Gui's *Sheng-ge Entrancement Technique*. It allowed her to greatly outstrip Playboy Lord in terms of speed, even making it possible for her to occasionally attack him without sustaining any injury herself.

We have the upper hand now! Our team was clearly winning. It would only be a matter of time before *Dark Emperor* was defeated, so long as there were no sudden changes...

"Lily, heal me! Wicked, Playboy Lord, come over and help Ambusher to cover me," Ming Huang instructed his team mates.

"Attack! Don't let him cast any spell," Wolf-dàgē bellowed in an urgent voice.

I immediately rushed forward, but that bastard Wicked kept blocking me. With Wicked being completely on the defensive, I was unable to quickly overcome him. While the two of

us were locked in an impasse, the rest of my party was busy attacking. The HP of the members of Dark Emperor dropped quickly and even Black Lily could not restore their health quickly enough.

Still, their mage Ming Huang continued to chant. With such a long incantation, the strength of the spell... We did not dare to so much as imagine it.

At long last, I managed to break through Wicked's defense. I swung my dao at Ming Huang—

“...Heaven’s Nine Wrath!”

Ming Huang raised both arms. He chanted the final line of the incantation, even as he was turned into a pillar of white light by my strike. By that point, his teammates Black Lily, Playboy Lord and Ambusher had already taken a free airplane ride back to the city as well.

His spell, however, was still in motion. The originally clear sky changed, turned ominously dark and overcast as lightning played among the dark clouds. Suddenly, the first bolt of lightning struck, hitting Doll. Before we could even shout, more than ten bolts of lightning flashed, almost becoming a single enormous pillar of lightning as they came crashing down on our heads.

“Prince...” Even in the midst of that sea of blazing light, Wolf-dàgē was still casting a healing spell on me.

As the piercingly bright lightning vanished, I found myself the only one left standing with 450/3000 health. Wolf-dàgē’s final, high-level healing spell must have saved my life.

I was at a loss. My eyes filled with tears as I thought, *I’d much rather experience the awfulness of death with everyone else than survive all by myself...*

“Come back to your senses and drink up,” Wicked’s cold voice came to me from behind.

I was alarmed that Wicked was still alive, but there was astonishment as well. *Wicked didn’t try to attack me while I was off my guard and now he’s even reminding me to drink up?* I looked at him with a questioning expression.

“You guys are the most worthy opponents that I’ve fought. Your team might look very weird, but you’re actually really strong,” Wicked said with a shred of respect in his cold eyes. “I will consider you and your team our sworn enemies. I hope you won’t disappoint me.”

“You wish to continue fighting?” I was rather sick of fighting.

"No, let's stop here for today," Wicked replied wearily as he sheathed his longsword. "I have to get back and console Ming Huang."

"Is Ming Huang really a guy?" I asked, curious.

"...Yes, he is. He is my younger brother in real life," Wicked explained, his tone a tad embarrassed.

"..." I looked at the icily cool dark elf and thought, *They sure aren't like a pair of brothers – but then again, I'm not like my brother myself...*

Just then, I thought of a pressing question. *Since Ming Huang is a guy...*

"Why did you guys first tell us to hold up?" ...*And cause this huge fight.*

It was a rare sight as Wicked's expression revealed a hint of embarrassment. "We just wanted to ask what sort of method you guys used to lure so many dragons and maybe get you guys to teach us."

"..." I stared at Wicked with a dumbfounded expression.

"...If there's nothing else, I'm leaving first."

"Wait up, Wicked, don't leave." I grabbed a corner of Wicked's shirt and looked at him with my most pitiful and helpless gaze.

"Is something the matter?" Wicked looked at me questioningly, an odd sort of feeling stirring in his heart.

"You mustn't abandon me," I said urgently, on the verge of tears.

"...?"

"I— I don't remember the way back to Star City..." With one hand held to the back of my head, I smiled innocently at him. *After all, it was Wolf-dàgē who led the way here...*

"...Follow me then."

• Chapter 6 •

A Normal Mage?

Upon returning to Star City, I headed straight for the inn where the team had agreed to meet up. As soon as I entered, I discovered an extremely somber atmosphere. The other members of Odd Squad were seated about a round table and all of them wore stiff expressions that seemed to suggest that they were actually seething inwardly.

As soon as they saw me arrive, everyone gave me a brief nod, and Wolf-dàgē indicated for me to sit down. I quickly pulled up a chair, not daring to fool around.

“Everyone, what do you think of the letter of challenge sent to us by the Dark Emperor?” Wolf-dàgē said, first asking for the team’s opinion on the matter.

“...?” Confusion was written all over my face. *What letter of challenge?*

“Prince has only just returned, so he still doesn’t know what happened, right?” Lolidragon had noticed my confusion and quickly explained. “We just ran into four members of Dark Emperor at the rebirth point and they... That Ming Huang in particular really deserves a verbal thrashing...”

“No, a PHYSICAL thrashing, for actually daring to call me a pervert.”

You mean you aren’t? I asked silently in my head. Gui’s icy expression surprised me though. *He actually looks pretty cool...*

"Yeah, and they even said that Doll was a weird necromancer...waaah!" Doll said, teary-eyed.

*That...seems to be the truth as well, I thought. *Sweat**

"...We began to fight with them again at the rebirth point, but this time, the city's NPC guards came rushing over. We had to stop and flee," said Wolf-dàgē, hammering his fist on the table in indignation.

"Hmph! If not for the guards, we would have killed them all the way back to level one." Gui had clenched his fist so tightly that his knuckles were cracking.

"After that, Dark Emperor PMed Gui, sending him a letter of challenge. They're setting the date for our face-off as next month's Adventurers' Tournament." As she finished speaking, Lolidragon too pounded the table a few times with her fist.

Looks like while Wicked and I weren't present, the conflict between our two teams sparked into a blaze! It was as Wicked had said – we had become sworn enemies. Sigh! It's all the fault of the word "girlie"... (It's not MY fault!)

I considered sharing what Wicked had told me earlier. *Would it help to lessen everyone's negativity towards Dark Emperor? I wondered. After all, it was all a misunderstanding...*

"Sigh! All that hard work that we put into fighting those dragons has gone to waste now – we didn't even manage to get those dragon XXs! That fight probably cost us at least fifty gold coins," Wolf-dàgē lamented, heaving a deep sigh. He thought, *To think that after everyone fought so hard that they were bone-weary, something like this would happen and leave us without so much as half a piece of loot...*

My dragon's XXs... We didn't manage to collect them? I thought. My mind went blank for three seconds. Then, I rose to my feet. With two loud *thuds*, I created two holes in the table with my fists.

"DAAARK EMPEROOOOR, EVEN IF IT KILLS ME, I'M GOING TO DESTROY YOU GUYS!" I roared, livid.

"...Well then, we'll accept their letter of challenge and train extra hard this month. That way, at the Adventurers' Tournament next month, they'll be able to see for themselves just how strong we – Odd Squad – really are," said Wolf-dàgē.

"What's the 'Adventurers' Tournament'?" I asked, looking at Lolidragon uncomprehendingly.

As usual, Lolidragon rolled her eyes and began to explain. “Twice a year, *Second Life* will hold an Adventurers’ Tournament. Through PvP⁵³ combat, the most outstanding team will emerge. Each team must have six members and the reward is a piece of land.”

“Not only must we defeat Dark Emperor, we must also emerge as the champions. Then the whole of *Second Life* will know who Odd Squad is,” Wolf-dàgē added in a mighty voice.

“Prince, do you still remember our promise? We’re going to create a legend!” Lolidragon PMed me. “This is a good opportunity. Besides, by creating a legend, I didn’t mean simply becoming the top player, but...”

“I know. After all, if it’s just a matter of becoming the top player, then I wouldn’t have picked the current training method. Lolidragon, I no longer want to create the legend of ‘Prince’ alone. I want to work hard alongside every member of Odd Squad and create a legend together,” I said, fixing her with a resolute look.

“Right!” Lolidragon replied with a smile.

“Let’s all work hard together, to create our own legend in *Second Life*.” I stretched out my right hand.

Lolidragon immediately placed her right hand on top of mine. In turn, Wolf-dàgē stretched out his large wolf paw, which was followed by Doll’s small hand, and Gui’s long and slender hand.

“Create a legend!” we roared.

Shortly thereafter, Doll suddenly held out her small hand. Counting on her fingers, she said, “Prince-gēgē’s one, Lolidragon-jiějie’s two, Wolf-gēge’s three, Gui-gēgē’s four, and Doll is the last one. That’s five! I don’t think we have enough people in our team to take part in the competition!”

...!

“Let’s find a mage!” Wolf-dàgē suggested. “Were it not for Dark Emperor’s mage, Ming Huang, we would have won a complete victory over them this time. Unfortunately, his *Heaven’s Nine Wrath* left our side pretty badly off as well. Therefore, I strongly suggest that we find a mage.”

⁵³ **PvP:** This is an acronym for “Player versus Player” and is used to describe in-game activities in which players are in direct competition with another real player (the Adventurer’s Tournament being a prime example). On the other hand, PvE (“Player versus Environment”) involves competition against AI-controlled monsters or other elements that are built into the game itself.

“Agreed!” Everyone approved of the idea, but I thought darkly, *The last time we looked for a mage, we found a necromancer like Doll. Then, when we were looking for an archer, we ended up with Gui, a bard... This time, what will our search for a mage yield? What other strange class/race combination do we not have yet?*

“Let’s go search at the Adventurers’ Guild then?” Gui suggested.

“Objection!” The other four members replied simultaneously.

Gui tapped his nose with a finger. “Then how are we going to find one?”

“Hmm...” Everyone looked troubled. *With only a month left, it would be best to find a mage quickly, so as to build up the camaraderie between members.*

Just as the members of Odd Squad were knitting their eyebrows together tightly enough to squash a mosquito to death...

“Excuse me, but are you looking for a mage? I was standing nearby, so I overheard...” A gentle voice reached our ears.

We turned our heads to look as one and a lovely young woman immediately entered our view. She reddened unconsciously under the scrutiny of five pair of eyes. Stammering a little, she said, “Um... Le-let me introduce myself. I’m called Yu Lian and I’m a human mage. My primary element is fire, secondary element is earth...and I’m level thirty-eight.”

We were all astonished. *A human mage? Such an ordinary class and race? That’s not possible.*

“You are female?” Lolidragon demanded, her gaze fixed on the girl’s chest. *Yep! And it’s pretty substantial too.*

“Yes...”

“You like men?” I asked sternly.

“...Yes.”

“You like love and justice?” Doll inquired, her face shining with love and justice.

“...?”

“You’re not allowed to snatch the beautiful and noble Prince from me!” Gui exclaimed, his expression anxious. A flying kick from me sent him soaring out the door. *I thought he’d become cool, but looks like his damnable personality hasn’t changed one whit.*

"Why do you want to join us?" Wolf-dàgē asked in an extremely serious voice.

Yu Lian's expression revealed her admiration. She replied, "After witnessing your conversation, I was very envious of your camaraderie and I wished I could be a part of your team."

For such a normal reason? The members of Odd Squad wondered, *Could it be...?*

"Have we...found ourselves a normal...teammate?" I asked, stuttering.

"What spells do you know?" Wolf-dàgē inquired in a level-headed manner, not yet giddy with happiness.

"I know *Flame Arrow*, *Fireball*, *Pillar of Fire*, *Wall of Flames*, *Flame Surge* and *Meteor Shower*. I don't know as many earth spells, only *Jaws of Hell*, *Earthquake*, and *Armor of Earth*."

Wolf-dàgē immediately stood up. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Miss Yu Lian. We're Odd Squad, with five members. Prince, warrior; Lolidragon, thief; Ugly Wolf, priest; Doll, necromancer; Guiliastes, bard – but just call him Gui. We welcome you to our team."

Without delay, we dragged Yu Lian to the valley to practice, and to see for ourselves just how great the benefits of having a mage could be...

I leapt back, even as a pillar of fire seared the centaur. I carefully blocked the centaur from the rest of the team, so as to prevent the mob from charging off and attacking our mage Yu Lian. In a short amount of time, there was a line of flame-seared centaurs lying dead on the ground. It actually took no longer than five minutes for us to defeat a centaur, which was even more powerful than a small dragon. *Just so you know, it took me ten minutes to kill a small dragon. Having a mage is a pretty good thing after all!*

"It's been tough on you, Yu Lian," Wolf-dàgē said. He patted the mage on the back.

"Not at all, this is what Yu Lian's supposed to do, after all," she replied bashfully, blushing.

"We finally have a normal teammate. I'm touched!" I was overwhelmed. *After all, there's finally a NORMAL person in Odd Squad. How can I not be thrilled?*

"Your beautiful and noble Highness, you are also very normal." Gui, who had recovered his irritating personality, had once again begun to address me with all those revolting terms of endearment.

"He's the most abnormal person of us all, since he is the only tranny in the whole of *Second Life*," Lolidragon muttered under her breath and I shot her a glare.

"Doll is very normal too!" Doll said with an innocent and uncomprehending expression.

...That's actually debatable.

"But in any case, Prince, you've got it wrong," Lolidragon told me.

"I got it wrong? How?"

"Basically, if someone can remain unaffected by your or Gui's looks, then that person can't be considered normal!" Lolidragon replied critically. "I initially thought that she might have joined because of you or Gui. However, ever since we left the city, she has spent a far greater amount of time talking with Wolf-gē than she has looking at you guys."

The four of us turned our heads as one to look at Wolf-dàgē and Yu Lian, who were talking animatedly.

No matter how I look at it, it appears that Yu Lian is...blushing? And a little shy? And her expression when chatting with Wolf-dàgē seems rather girlish... It can't be, right?

The four of us looked at one another. Then, with an expression which said that she was determined to uncover the truth, Lolidragon marched over and dragged Yu Lian back. With the excuse that it was a private chat between ladies, she forbade Wolf-dàgē from following or eavesdropping. She then grabbed my face with her right hand and Gui's face with her left, and shoved our faces in front of Yu Lian.

"Yu Lian, what do you think of Gui's looks?"

"...?" Yu Lian was taken aback, her confusion clear on her face.

"Just say what you think," Lolidragon replied firmly.

"Gui's looks are...very neat!" Yu Lian hesitated, as though she was fishing for the right words to say without hurting anyone.

...Very neat? What sort of description is that?

Lolidragon then asked, "And what do you think of Prince's looks?"

Yu Lian smiled cheerfully and patted me on the head. "Prince is very adorable!"

Adorable... That was the first time I'd heard anyone describe me like that. *You're describing this incomparable handsomeness – which nearly left me a narcissist – as "adorable"?*

"Then what do you think of Wolf-gē's looks?" Lolidragon asked, her tone cautious.

Upon hearing Wolf-gē's name, Yu Lian actually turned bright red and stammered, "Wolf-dàgē's looks are ve-very unique, and also mature, and composed." Saying that, she seemed to be caught up in some kind of fantasy... "Even his fur is a beautiful silver, my favorite color."

Silver? We turned to look at Wolf-dàgē's very messy gray fur...

"...He is the most handsome, most masculine man I've ever met," Yu Lian said, her face filled with loving admiration as she looked at Wolf-dàgē. She then turned back to look at Gui and me and spoke in an apologetic tone. "Don't worry, your looks are pretty okay. Some girl will definitely like your looks, so don't give up!" She said encouragingly in her gentle voice.

"What a mystifying sense of beauty!" I said in realization.

"As expected, it is impossible for Odd Squad to have a normal member," Lolidragon concluded calmly.

• Chapter 7 •

Blood Tiara

In order to avenge my dragon's XX in the upcoming Adventurers' Tournament, we – Odd Squad – wiped out all the mobs in Raging Dragon Valley and Centaurs' Prairie during the month before the competition. After we had completed all our preparations, we even went on to defeat a twenty-meter-tall Lake Monster with dozens of tentacles, greatly increasing our combat ability.

Once again, I pored over all the various famous fighting games, shounen manga, and *wuxia* novels, greatly improving my fighting skills by devising five new greater ultimate attacks and ten lesser ultimate attacks. My techniques were guaranteed to completely surprise my adversaries, especially my Buddha Mountain's Phantom Leg ability. The damage it could inflict was actually on par with my regular dao attacks.

My weapon, Black Dao, had reached level twenty-eight and had an attack power of eighty-five. Although it might not be as strong as a godly weapon, it could still be considered a top-grade weapon. Now, about my pet, Meatbun... After Dog Beating Technique, Poisonous Meatbun, and Double Kill, Meatbun had also come up with numerous new abilities...which I won't reveal for now.

<Name: Prince>

<Level: 52 | Class: Warrior | Health: 4200 | Mana: 750 | Strength: 70 + 85 | Agility: 65 | Physique: 40 | Abilities: ??? >

<Pet: Meat Bun | Level: 38 | Abilities: ??? >

As for Lolidragon, she has been perfecting the art of stealth attacks, researching about the ways of the ninja in Japan, the arts of assassins in the West, the blow dart⁵⁴ techniques of the South, and last but not least, the whole range of secret weapons used in Ancient China... *Sigh!*

Monsters she faced often died in mysterious ways, including those people who dared to oppose her – most of whom did not even know how they turned into a pillar of light – causing our team's reputation to be perpetually decreasing. Her agility had increased to the point where her walking speed was about the same as our running speed, while her running speed practically seemed like teleporting ...*Lolidragon, if I catch you sneaking up and hiding behind me again, I'm going to get really pissed off!*

<Name: Lolidragon>

<Level: 50 | Class: Thief | Health: 2800 | Mana: 900 | Strength: 45 + 40 | Agility: 95 | Abilities: ??? >

Wolf-dàgē had learned the spell *Heal Party*, which would make future healing easier. In addition, Dàgē had also learned a bunch of useful abilities, although most of them were offensive abilities... *Dàgē, please remember that you are a priest– Hey, Dàgē! Killing monsters is my job, so could you please stop charging forward and sending the mobs flying with a kick? You're making me – the warrior – lose face. Also, stop secretly increasing your strength; you're supposed to place your points in willpower and intelligence, you hear? Kicking again?!*

I should also mention that Dàgē and Yu Lian are now husband and wife...

<Name: Ugly Wolf>

<Level: 52 | Class: Priest | Health: 2500 | Mana: 2000 | Strength: 50 + 25 | Willpower: 56 | Intelligence: 60 | Abilities: ??? >

Doll, on the other hand, had been frightened by the skeletons that she summoned on numerous occasions. Her skeletons' current appearances look...even I'd freaked out a couple of times. Doll has also been able to summon an undead even more powerful than her skeletons. Unfortunately, the first time she attempted to summon it, she fainted straightaway from terror, and has never since gathered enough courage to summon it again. *Sigh! Doll, if you only had more courage, your skeletons would have become the main pillar of support for our team by now.*

<Name: Doll>

⁵⁴ **Blow dart:** A blow dart is a weapon using a pipe to blow a projectile or dart to a target. The idea can be widely found in South East Asia and South America.

<Level: 48 | Class: Necromancer | Health: 2300 | Mana: 2800 | Willpower: 70 | Intelligence: 75 | Abilities: ??? >

As for Gui, his level would have been the same as mine...if I hadn't killed him twice. After causing his level to drop twice, I received a warning from the rest of the team: I was allowed to berate him, thrash him, or torture him (even slicing pieces of flesh off him was no problem) so long as it didn't affect the team's standard. Causing him to lose levels was prohibited.

I agreed, although I felt I had been misunderstood... *It's not like I wanted to kill him either!* The first time, it was him who suddenly wrapped me in a tight embrace, causing my heart to prance like a lively deer. Then I remembered that of all things, he happened to be a gay... That made me so mad that I couldn't help but thrash him to death.

(Lolidragon: He only hugged you because you were about to get dragged into the lake by that lake monster...)

The second time, he blew gently into my ear and caused me to blush, so...

(Ugly Wolf: He was just trying to tell you that you hadn't done up your zipper...)

In any case, Gui had learned quite a lot of supportive abilities, all of which would be very useful in battle.

<Name: Guiliastes>

<Level: 50 | Class: Bard | Health: 2500 | Mana: 3000 | Willpower: 60 | Wisdom: 60 | Physique: 35 (This is so he can survive Prince's attacks for a little longer.) | Abilities: ??? >

Yu Lian...is currently known as Yu Lian-dàsǎo.⁵⁵ She spent a month glued to Wolf-dàgē, flirting non-stop until the rest of us couldn't take it anymore. We then decided to tie up Wolf-dàgē with chains and sent him to the wedding chapel. With our kidnap— I mean, blessings, the two of them finally got married and are now indulging in the sugary, joined-at-the-hip behavior of newlyweds.

<Name: Yu Lian>

<Level: 48 | Class: Mage | Health: 2300 | Mana: 3200 | Willpower: 70 | Wisdom: 65 | Abilities: ??? >

⁵⁵ **Yu Lian-dàsǎo:** The suffix is written in Chinese as “大嫂”, meaning “sister-in-law”. It is usually only used on the wife of one's elder brother, however.

In the real world...

"Sis, I'm telling you, my team is going to participate in the Adventurers' Tournament!" My younger brother, Yang Ming, bragged with a superior look on his face.

"Oh... Team Rose, huh!" I felt slightly troubled. *Wouldn't the situation be really awkward if we had to face Team Rose?* Thinking of my good sister, Rose... *I don't think I'd have the heart to fight.* Plus there's also the highwaywoman Fairsky and my brother... *Sigh! How am I supposed to fight?*

"Nope, I left Team Rose a while ago."

I was stunned. "Why?"

My brother's face was mottled with anger. "It's because that beauty, Snow White Rose, actually rejected me, saying something about her heart belonging to someone else. And that Fairsky! I heard she ran off chasing after him too. That damnable, interfering Prince has cost me two beauties!"

"..." I lowered my head and continued eating my noodles.

"Forget it. In any case, while my current team may not have any beauties for me to chase, my current team members are actually really good players. We'll probably be one of the top teams in the Adventurers' Tournament."

"Which team is that?" I asked, curious.

"Dark Emperor. Coincidentally enough, their sworn enemy is Prince too. I'm gonna beat the crap out of him 'til he cries for mercy this time."

"...No supper for you tonight."

"What?! But I didn't do anything to you!" my brother whined.

Meanwhile, with Dark Emperor...

"Hmph! I'm going to make sure that damned sissy and that perverted Gui know how powerful we are! We shall crush them under our heel!" Ming Huang roared, his lovely face contorting in fury.

"That's right. Besides, I must let that bard know that archers are the *real* ranged attackers," Ambusher added in a resentful tone.

"Me, all I want is to see that gorgeous elf thief again..." Playboy Lord submerged himself once again into images of Lolidragon's beautiful face and sexy body. (Ming Huang and Black Lily: "Everyone, beat up that traitor!")

"We must defeat Odd Squad and emerge the champions!" The three members of Dark Emperor roared.

"..." Wicked said nothing.

Meanwhile, with Rose Team...

"Rose, do you think Prince would really fall in love with us?" Fairsky asked.

"Of course, Fairsky. As long as we try our best and never give up, Prince will definitely be touched by our efforts," Rose replied positively. *No matter what, we will make Prince accept us.*

"..." Broken Sword, Legolas, Li'l Strong, and For Healing Only could only look on helplessly.

Time passed quickly as each team busied itself with its preparations, and soon the day of *Second Life's* first Adventurers' Tournament arrived.

"Prince, draw a number for our team!" Wolf-dàgē said to me, after we had registered our team.

"Okay..." I extended my hand into the box, searched around for a moment and grabbed a piece of paper. *This is it*, I thought, and decided to take it out of the box.

Lolidragon asked enthusiastically, "How's it? What number is it?"

I unfolded the paper slowly. "The fourth division... Number 4444."⁵⁶

"..."

"...In any case, shall we go and see who our opponents are?" Wolf-dàgē suggested.

In single file, we walked over to where the chart with the list of competitors was. The chart felt like it was as long as the Great Wall of China as we tried to figure out where our squad's

⁵⁶ **Number 4444:** Chinese usually considers the number 'four' inauspicious because it is a homonym for 'death' in their language. To read up more about this, check out Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetraphobia>.

name was. The place was so crowded that we all decided to simply let Wolf-dàgē open the way for us. We hid behind his broad back and discussed the details of the competition... Although, to be more accurate, it was just Lolidragon explaining to me the bits that I didn't know...

"*Sigh!* Why are there so many people participating in this competition?" I grumbled.

"Isn't it obvious? The winning team gets to own a piece of land, plus there's the fame – the team's name will be known throughout *Second Life*. And on top of that, participants get to earn experience points!" Lolidragon provided the explanation, as usual.

"We earn experience points?" I looked at Lolidragon doubtfully.

"Because the tournament will probably take up a lot of time, *Second Life* came up with this scheme: as long as you win a match, you will gain experience points equivalent to killing monsters that are the same level as your opponents, multiplied by ten."

"No wonder so many people participated. It's worth it just as a way to gain experience," I mused, finally seeing the light.

"Found it! Doll found it!" Doll shouted. Our gazes immediately followed the direction her finger was pointing.

"The fourth division, number 4444 – Odd Squad. That's us all right," Gui observed.

"Our opponent is the Perfect Princess Team," Wolf-dàgē slowly intoned.

"...I have a bad feeling about this." I felt a shiver run down my spine.

There were two more matches before our turn. I once again checked to make sure my boots were zipped up, tightened the cinches on my soft leather armor, and unsheathed my Black Dao and gave it couple of swings. *Alright, I'm ready.* I turned toward my teammates and received an "okay" signal from them.

At this moment, Lolidragon suddenly walked over to me and I saw that there was a broad smile on the others' faces. *Are they plotting something...?!* Lolidragon took out an elegantly wrapped box. "Happy birthday, Prince. This is a present from all of us."

"Tha... Thank you." My voice choked as I took the package, touched. Aside from that, however, I thought, *Crap, if I don't bake a cake for my twin brother today, I won't be having any peace for the rest of the year!*

I quickly unwrapped the present. Opening it, I found that it contained a wine-red tiara⁵⁷ with mysterious and intricate patterns engraved on it. Even though it wasn't heavily decorated, it still looked extremely elegant. *I love it!* Realizing that my teammates wouldn't gift me with a useless accessory, I quickly checked its stats.

<Blood Tiara: Growing-type accessory; strength +10, agility +10; Equip: HP recovery speed +10%; Defense: 10% of damage received negated>

I stared at it, dumfounded, thinking, *This is a rare item! And it's a rare item that's practically designed for me!*

"Hurry up and wear it, Prince! You'll definitely look great in it!" Lolidragon said anxiously.

I put it on, feeling the cool metal slide perfectly into place on my forehead. I quickly asked, "How do I look?"

"Oh, you look simply splendid! It suits you perfectly, Your Highness! I knew it, buying a headgear for you was a great idea!" The adoration in Gui's eyes was more intense than before.

I resisted the urge to give him a thrashing. *Paaatience, there are plenty of chances to beat him up after the competition...*

"It really does look great on you. The wine-red color of the tiara is very similar to the color of your eyes, plus it complements your fair skin and white hair..." *Lolidragon! Kindly wipe the drool off your face.*

"That's why Doll insisted on pink!" Doll's expression was one of determination.

Wolf-dàgē sighed. "It was so difficult just trying to agree on what to buy! Gui insisted on buying a crown so that you'd look like a true prince. Lolidragon thought only something exquisite could be worthy of your looks. Doll insisted that we get something pink because it's pretty, and I thought usefulness was the key."

"Later, I saw someone selling this tiara and I thought it was simply too suitable for you! So we bargained with the seller for a long time – we even used Lolidragon's female charms and had Doll make puppy dog eyes... But we finally managed to buy it! Be sure to cherish it," Yu Lian-dàsǎo said tenderly as she patted my head.

Feeling embarrassed yet touched, I said, "It must be expensive! Thank you, everyone..."

⁵⁷ **Tiara:** Although tiaras are usually worn on top of the head (like a mini-crown), the one that Prince is wearing is the type that's a band around the forehead, as depicted in the manhua. It can still be considered a tiara, however.

Everyone smiled at me fondly. I stared at my reflection in the mirror, silently vowing that I would work hard, so that we would all be seated on the champion's throne and create our own legend together. However, never would I have imagined that in the upcoming days, this crimson tiara would become one of the major traits of the Blood Elf, one of my nicknames, or that this tiara would come to be known as the Blood Tiara.

• Extra Chapter •

Yu Lian VS Ugly Wolf

“Wolf-dàgē, do you think the timing for my spell just now was okay? Is there any area that I should work on?” Yu Lian asked bashfully.

“Not at all, I think it was really well done. The timing, direction, and strength of the magic were all perfect,” replied Ugly Wolf with a gentle smile.

“Really?”

Yes, it was pretty well done, but I think she would do even better if she didn't stop to ask Wolf-dàgē for his opinion – and end up chatting for ten minutes – each time she finished casting a spell, I thought exasperatedly. I continued to fight mob after mob, even as I glared N number of times at the couple, who were happily chatting away.

“It's been so long and they're still there in their private little world, and they're not even paying the rest of us any attention. Their behavior's...going to make me die of envy,” I complained as I cast yet another somewhat aggrieved glance at the two.

“What are you envious for, Prince?” Lolidragon remarked sardonically. “You must be aware that you already have a super-ultra-beauty by your side, one of the most beautiful women on Earth—” Here she pointed at herself. “—As well as a super-ultra-hottie, whose looks have no rival in this universe,” she added, pointing at Gui. “Plus, if you're bored, you can always admire your own peerlessly handsome looks...” Lolidragon muttered under her breath.

Right! Let's see: So I can either be a lesbian and fall in love with Lolidragon or I can fall in love with Gui, who happens to be gay! And if I have too much time on my hands, I could always indulge in a spot of narcissism...

Great, just great! I thought, coldly mocking my own wonderful luck at attracting people.⁵⁸
Waaah! There goes my self-confidence...

"Sigh, I really wish that Prince and I could be like them someday." Gui's expression was one of envy as well.

"Doll also really hopes to meet a prince on a white horse." Doll's expression clearly showed that she was lost in her own fantasy.

You could...just buy me a white horse to ride on?

"Sigh... I'm so envious!" The four of us said simultaneously, directing our resentful gazes at the beauty and the beast, who were still engaged in an intimate conversation.

With a slight smile on her face, Yu Lian walked over toward us. However, the moment her back was turned to Wolf-dàgē, her smile instantly vanished and her eyebrows furrowed. In a woeful tone, she said, "Everyone, I would like to ask you something... Does Wolf-dàgē have someone that he likes?"

"I don't think so. I've never heard him mention anything about it!" I hesitated, thinking that something like that was just plain unlikely. "Did something happen to make you think that way?"

Yu Lian's gaze was full of distress. Tears were welling up in her eyes, making the four of us panic. "Then why doesn't Wolf-dàgē respond, no matter how many times I hint to him that I like him?"

"Um... Did you say it as clearly as possible?" Lolidragon asked carefully.

"I told him, if a guy as great as him wanted a wife, I'd definitely marry him... Was that not clear enough?" Yu Lian asked anxiously.

Lolidragon gave her a helpless look. "To most people, that would be sufficiently clear, but Odd Squad has two members who are very slow when it comes to feelings and one of them is Wolf-gē."

⁵⁸ **Luck at attracting people:** The actual phrase used here is “桃花运” (*prn. táo huā yùn*) – *táo huā* refers to the cherry blossom flowers and *yùn* means luck. For its meaning, think of it as “the flower's luck at attracting the birds and bees”. As such, Prince is mocking her own luck at attracting such weird people.

"Who's the other?" I asked, curious. *It's Doll, right?*

"Ahem, that's not important. What is important right now is that we should help out Yu Lian and Wolf-gē. After all, it's not an everyday thing that such a lovely girl falls for Wolf-gē. How could we possibly idly stand by and just watch when Wolf-gē's obliviousness might cost him the love of his life?" Lolidragon said virtuously. "Well guys, shall we help them?"

"Yes!" we roared enthusiastically.

"Yes to what?" Wolf-dàgē's voice came suddenly from behind.

We turned around slowly, innocent smiles on our faces.

"Yes to training hard, Wolf-dàgē." My smile was especially incandescent and artless.

"Yes, let's all work hard!" Wolf-dàgē's face broke into an ugly smile. Yu Lian gazed at him, drunk with happiness at the sight.

We stood in a line, waiting for Wolf-dàgē and Yu Lian to leave, engaged in a discussion about magic. Once they were out of earshot, we began to discuss amongst ourselves...

"How should we help them?" I asked.

"Write a confession letter in Yu Lian's name," Gui suggested.

"Prepare a romantic candlelit dinner for Wolf-gēge and Yu Lian-jiějie," offered Doll.

"Slip Viagra into Wolf-dàgē's drink," said Lolidragon. When the three of us turned to glare at her, she said calmly, "It's far more direct and simple. We'll just use it as a last resort."

Mission "Help Yu Lian to Catch a Husband": Begin!

Gui immediately began to pen a confession letter. As for Doll and Lolidragon... After messing up five of the dishes I was trying to prepare, they were escorted out of the kitchen under my baleful gaze and the threat of my Black Dao. After that, they busied themselves with laying out the table instead.

Gui hurried excitedly toward to Wolf-dàgē, the finished letter in hand. The rest of us had followed him and were secretly watching from behind. "Wolf-dàgē, I found this letter lying on the ground on my way here and it's addressed to you!"

"Is that so?" Ugly Wolf said, a dubious expression on his face as he took the letter from Gui, and began to read its contents aloud. *"Warm rain falls; a gentle breeze shatters the frozen chill. The willow's eyes and the plum's cheeks – here is Spring, awaking. Yet who is there to share a cup of wine or talk of poetry with me? Tears melt the powder as the flower-pins on my head grow heavy. Clothes with their golden threads, I try them on; the cliffs of my pillow, they ruin my hair adornments. Alone, with only intense sorrow for company, without good dreams; I light a flower-lamp in the silence of the night. Yu Lian..."*

The three of us turned ashen-faced. I hurriedly grabbed Gui and towed him back. "What on Earth did you write in that letter?" I demanded.

"Li Qing Zhao's 'Flower of Butterfly Love'.⁵⁹ It's a very touching poem," Gui said in a moved voice. He was even dabbing away tears from the corners of his eyes. "I believe that after reading that poem, Wolf-dàgē will definitely understand Yu Lian's heart."

Is that so? I looked at Wolf-dàgē with a dubious expression. *Will he really understand?*

⁵⁹ **Li Qing Zhao's "Flower of Butterfly Love":** The lines which Gui penned in the letter are actually the lines of a poem by a famous poetess in Chinese history, 李清照 (*prn. lǐ qīng zhào*). Li Qing Zhao (1084 to approx. 1155 A.D.) lived during the Song dynasty. She was born into a fairly well-to-do family, with a scholarly father and an artsy family, and began to write poems in her youth. When she was eighteen, Li Qing Zhao married. She was extremely close to her husband, and their marriage was a happy one until war and civil strife separated them. Her husband passed away approximately two years after, leaving her heartbroken.

«蝶恋花» (*prn. dié liàn huā*), the title of the poem, literally means "the flower of a butterfly's love". The poem is written in "wén yán wén", a style of writing often used in poetry and even general writing in the past. The notable feature of *wén yán wén* is that it condenses many words into very few words. As a result, each line of the poem is actually packed with meaning, but it's almost like reading a poem that only has nouns and adjectives in it. That's one of the reasons why Wolf (and everyone else, except Gui) are absolutely lost after reading the poem – because very few people these days actually know how to read stuff written in *wén yán wén*!

In Chinese, the poem reads, "暖雨晴风初破冻，柳眼梅腮，已觉春心动。酒意诗情谁与共？泪融残粉花钿重。乍试夹衫金缕缝，山枕斜欹，枕损钗头凤。独抱浓愁无好梦，夜阑犹翦灯花弄。" (Note that the original poems rhymes.)

The persona is that of a lady, who is sitting by the window, admiring the view outside as Spring arrives. The willow's leaves and the plum blossoms remind her of eyes and cheeks respectively, and she is reminded also of happier times early in her marriage. Seeing the beautiful sight, her feelings awaken – feelings of extreme sorrow. Her husband is away, and she remembers the times when he was by her side, and longs for his return.

Her sorrow overcomes her; her tears ruin her makeup and even the pins in her hair feel heavy. Thus, she stays indoors rather than head outdoors, even though she has already tried on the new clothes for Spring. She lies on her bed (thus her pillow dents – hence the mention of "cliffs") and ruins her hair adornments. She attempts to find some peace in good dreams, but is unable to even enter the realms of sleep. Finally, it is already night, and in the silence she lights a lamp to lessen her solitude.

Just then, Wolf-dàgē beckoned me over.

"Prince, do you understand what this is talking about?" Wolf-dàgē asked softly, embarrassed.

"I do know! It means that I'm going to give Gui a sound beating," I replied as I stretched my neck to loosen my muscles and clenched my fists tightly, cracking my knuckles.

I placed the last dish on the table and then looked at the candles, the fresh flowers, the snowy white table cloth, the white plates, and the bowls holding delicacies cooked with painstaking effort, as well as the star-studded skies. *Ah, how romantic! Not for nothing did I get Lolidragon to "borrow" things from the local diner...*

Hurriedly, Doll, Gui, Lolidragon, and I hid ourselves in the bushes by the candle-lit dinner and waited. After receiving our note, Wolf-dàgē and Yu Lian should come here and then enjoy this romantic candlelight dinner... *Hehe! With that, their feelings will blossom!*

"Prince, what are you guys doing? Why did you leave a note instead of using the team channel?" Wolf-dàgē's suspicion-filled voice came from the team channel. Panicked, the four of us started pushing the blame, mentally cursing: *Stupid online game, why must it have a team channel!*

"Guys, don't make a sound on team channel," Lolidragon told the rest of us. "When Wolf-dàgē can't get a response from us, he'll definitely come here with Yu Lian." We nodded.

"Forget it. I have no idea what they are doing. Yu Lian, are you hungry? Let's go get a bite in town before we look for them," Ugly Wolf said over team channel to Yu Lian, who was beside him.

I sat glumly at the table, watching as my painstakingly prepared meal was devoured by three gluttons. *Waaah! I cooked all that for Wolf-dàgē and Yu Lian, so can you guys not gobble it all up so unceremoniously?!*

"Hmph, I told you guys that your methods were no good. What's the point of being so reserved?" Lolidragon swallowed the last mouthful of the goose drumstick that she had snatched from the other two before she continued haranguing us. "Using Viagra is so much simpler and faster. Once the deed is done, everything will be okay. After all, we all know that Wolf-dàgē is not the type of guy who would deny responsibility for his actions!"

"It can't be helped, I guess. Since all our other plans have failed, it looks like we have no other choice." I stood up, steeling my resolve. "Lolidragon, tell me where they sell Viagra. I'll go and buy some."

"Uhh...Why don't you check and see if Watson's⁶⁰ sells it?" Lolidragon replied, her expression hesitant.

"I doubt that they sell it... Besides, since when did Watson's open a store in *Second Life*?" Gui asked, looking at Lolidragon suspiciously.

I gave Lolidragon a savage cuff on the head.

"A bunch of half-assed ideas! *Gah*, All of you are useless! Looks like we'll have to resort to this," I said. I looked at my fist with a vicious glint in my eyes.

Seriously irked, I immediately rushed into town and bought a spiked club, a length of chains, a small knife, a bottle of hair cream, and a birdcage containing a white dove. Then I went in search of Yu Lian and Wolf-dàgē.

Upon locating them, I snuck up stealthily behind Wolf-dàgē with the club in hand. Yu Lian watched with eyes as wide as saucers as I rendered Wolf-dàgē unconscious with a direct hit to his head. As everyone else watched in stupefaction, I – a slender elf – bound a two-meter tall, physically impressive wolf up in chains and hauled him away!

"Lolidragon, Doll, you guys are to take Yu Lian to buy a wedding dress and do her makeup. We'll meet at the church in an hour. Gui, come with me."

"Yessir," they chorused.

I took out the small knife and the hair cream, passing them to Gui as I said, "Make Wolf-dàgē look more presentable and like a proper gentleman. He'll be married in an hour."

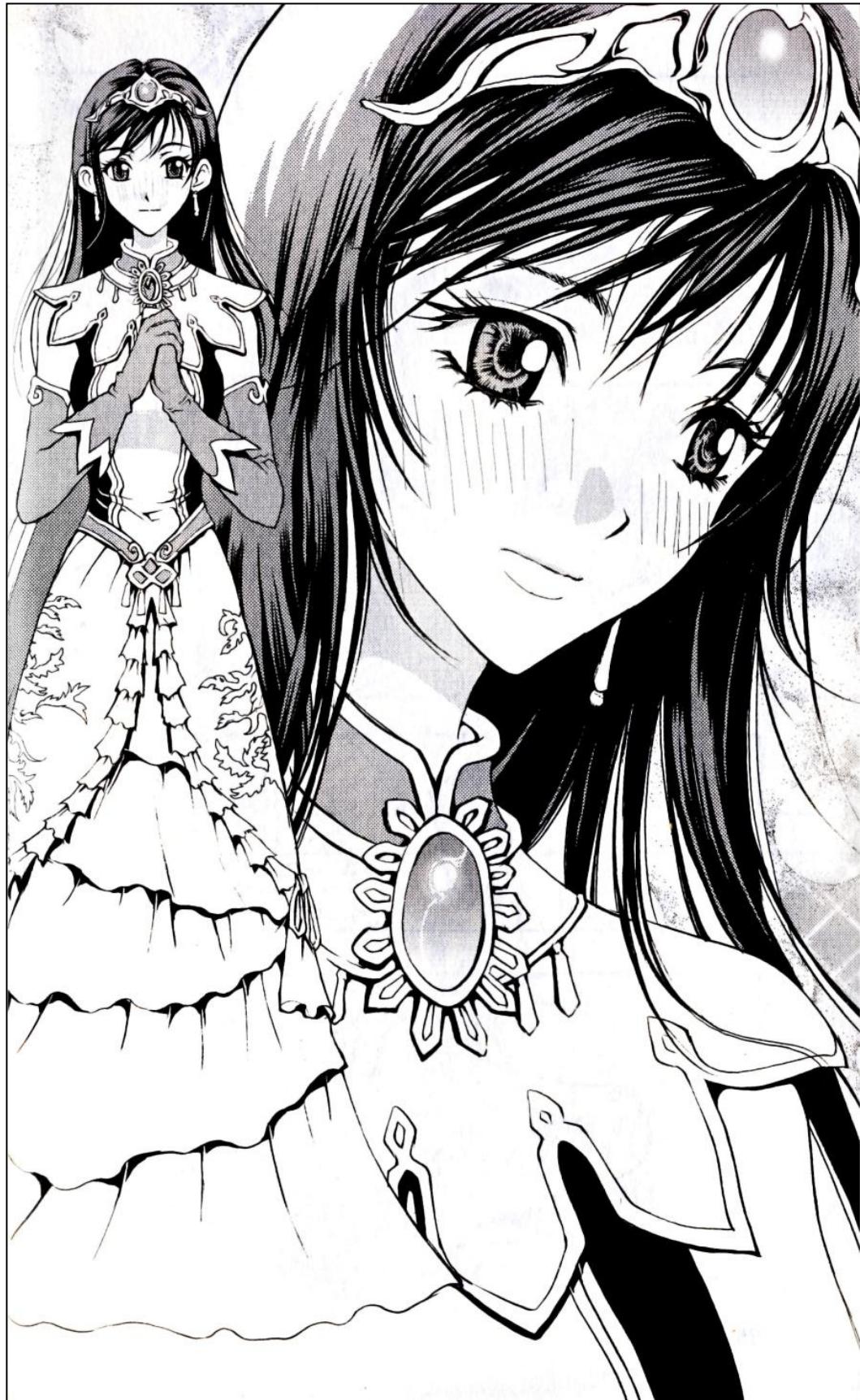
"A proper *gentleman*?" Gui looked at Wolf-gē's wolfish face. "I'm afraid that's...impossible!"

"...A proper *gentlewolf*, then."

With a two-meter tall wolfman slung over my shoulder, I walked toward the church, ignoring the startled expressions on the faces of passersby. In this brusque fashion, Gui and I stood waiting at the church's entrance for the lovely bride, Yu Lian.

As I'd predicted, they had yet to arrive even after an hour and a half, and so I switched to the team channel and issued a final warning. "Ladies, I will give you another ten minutes. After that, I will auction off this male wolf on my shoulder." With that, I could hear the sounds of them panicking.

⁶⁰ **Watson's:** A famous convenience store. They sell shampoo, snacks, boxes, makeup, and even some medicines.



"I'm here, don't sell off my wolf!" Yu Lian came at a run, wearing a snow white wedding dress, her face the picture of anxiety.

Seeing that everything was ready, I dumped Wolf-dàgē on the floor. As expected, Wolf-dàgē had already regained consciousness. In a ferocious tone, I growled, "Yu Lian wants to marry you. Will you take her as your wife or not?"

Ugly Wolf looked at Yu Lian in astonishment, while Yu Lian lowered her head bashfully. In a slow voice, he said, "Do you really wish to marry me? I am only a priest, and have no way to protect you from monsters. I am an ugly wolf, with no handsome features to speak of. Nor am I a rich man and I cannot provide you with equipment. Knowing all that, do you truly wish to marry me?"

With a face shining with tenderness and resolve, Yu Lian replied, "You are a priest, so you stand by my side and aid our friends together with me. You may not have handsome features, but your kind heart is more valuable than that. You are not rich, but you have passion and treasure your friends deeply. To me, you are incomparably perfect." Yu Lian took a deep breath and said, "Yes, I wish to marry you."

Doll took out a handkerchief and dabbed at her tears. "This is so moving; Doll is going to cry."

Lolidragon and I had long since begun to hug one another and cry. And Gui? That fellow who had tried to sneakily hug me had already been kicked all the way to the next street.

Wolf-dàgē's face was bright red. "Yu Lian..."

I looked impatiently at the two furiously blushing, wordless individuals. Then I picked up Yu Lian with my right arm and Wolf-dàgē with my left (that's the good thing about having a lot of strength! If you're bored, you can drag people to the altar...) and kicked open the door to the church. With one person under each arm, I walked over to the pastor and said, "Pastor! Wedding!" With that, I dumped the two of them onto the floor.

The pastor began to rattle off the usual lines for a wedding ceremony. (My apologies, I was busy cleaning up the dove, since I was planning to release it later, so I didn't pay any attention to what he said.) All I heard was the last few lines: "...Then, Yu Lian, do you take this man, Ugly Wolf, to be your husband, to comfort his soul in times of difficulty, to care for him in times of sickness, to be by his side from this day forth, and never to leave or forsake him?"

Yu Lian looked at Ugly Wolf briefly and in a passionate voice answered, "Yes, I do."

"Ugly Wolf, do you also take this woman, Yu Lian, to be your wife, to comfort her soul in times of difficulty, to care for her in times of sickness, to be by her side from this day forth, and never to leave or forsake her?"

"Yes, I do," Ugly Wolf said unhesitatingly.

Wooooo! Release the dove, release the dove! With a whoop of joy, I released the dove – a symbol of felicity – and roared, "Three cheers for Yu Lian-dàsǎo!"

Afterword

<erialis> Here we are at the end of volume 1, and for those of you who are still reading, we've prepared a bit of entertainment for you – our very own afterword, which is more of a Q-and-A session with the crew members of Prince Rev! whom you don't often get a chance to hear from. The following chat transcript is a heavily condensed version of a couple of group convos that we had for this purpose...

<erialis> What was it about ½ Prince that got your interest? Why read it?

<k00st3r> I came across it when I was browsing mangafox. I'd run out of manga to read, and then I saw and I thought, "Ooh, this looks interesting, let's read this." I found out it was a novel after a while.

<Serao> I'm a sucker for gender-bender stories, and one relating to gaming... I was so there. There really is a strong feminist subtext there too, and I was really excited to see that that seemed a lot more of a focus in the novels.

<Shadow Rebirth> Hmm... Because I could totally picture myself in Feng Lan's place, having a blast massacring little green blobs.

<smerian> I like 1/2 Prince cause it's sooo funny. It uses a different entertaining way, making each character endearing to the reader. It develops its characters and does so in a fun and sort of humor.

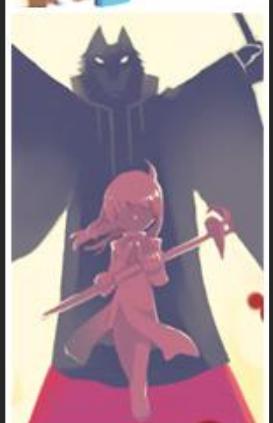
<erialis> ... /*sweats* upon seeing smerian's upside-down reply/ What do you all think of Prince's speech at the end of chapter 2?

<SR> I agree with it, especially because too few mangas have female leads with backbones. Most PRETEND to have backbones, but once they get into trouble, they get saved instantly. --

<Spence> That part is cool, because it gives us an insight into how our male-dominant society shapes the way females have to act, and how our society lives by a double standard.

<erialis> Spence, could you rephrase that into something less intelligent?

<SR> Lmao!





<Spence> Female rights! Advocates equal treatment for both sexes!

<erialis> Okay, next question. Any other scenes in volume 1 that you like?

<Eilinel> I like the scene in chapter 2 where Prince fought using whatever style he liked, and Lolidragon was so amazed. (I laughed like hell when he chopped the wolf up!) I think it's really cool because I, as a gamer, never really thought of doing something like that, and always only followed the rules...

<smerian> Hey, k00st3r and spence, a question for you guys... Who would you date in ½ Prince? XD

<Spence> Me, myself, and I.

<erialis> /cuffs spence on the head à la lolidragon style/

<smerian> *glares at Spence*

<k00st3r> Loli seems the most fun to hang around with.

<Serao> *cough* Lolicon *cough*

<erialis> Spence still refusing to pick a character?

<k00st3r> He picked narcissism.

<Spence> Feng Lan. I like girls who have their own brains and thoughts.

<erialis> Then why not Yu Lian?

<Spence> She'll eat me alive for spending too much. And she's into furry guys...

<Serao> She's intense. A dark horse. Perhaps working as a dominatrix somewhere.

<SR> Lmao. That is the most hilarious thing I've heard all day. XD

<erialis> What about the ladies? Who would you date?

<Spence> You can't choose me, ladies. I'm not in the novels. Just an FYI.

<smerian> Meatbun! :D

<k00st3r> *facepalms* Try to keep the person somewhat anthropomorphic.

<Serao> I'm trying to pick one but none are really standing out. Maybe Gui in normal mode? But I'd know he was a squealing M inside and it would be a bit weird.

<Erihppas> Gui is so loving...yet Wicked is stronger, but Wolf is...not so bad either. Can I have all three? 8D

- <erialis> So Erihppas wants a harem?
- <SR> I'll probably pick Non Gon Zui...
- <erialis> LMAO.
- <SR> ... *Gong. >< I think V1 fried my brain. >>;
- <erialis> THIS was what came into my head when I read the "Gon".
- <SR> /goes and cries in a corner/ TT.TT
- <k00st3r> I see a picture of a dinosaur... Were you talking about the picture that looks like a dino sitting on a bunny?
- <SR> I've been mentally scarred. Why is it sitting on a rabbit?
- <Serao> Wow, SR. Your boyfriend is...interesting looking. I was gonna fight you for him but I need to go...wash my hair.
- <k00st3r> *facepalms*
- <Spence> LOLOL possibly funniest picture of a dino I've ever seen!
- <erialis> Sigh. We've really racked up a list of typos (during translation, proof-reading, convos, and heaven knows when else)...
- <k00st3r> 2/3 Prince! (*This was a typo committed by SR a couple of days before this group conversation took place... XD*)
- <SR> TT.TT
- <k00st3r> That was an epic typo.
- <erialis> Don't forget the "mask adds amour" and "Amour of Earth" typos.
- <erialis> **Okay, a question for Erihppas! If you were given a choice to tie up either Gui or Wicked, who would you choose?**
- <Erihppas> Gui! XD Coz...well, Wicked is stronger. o_o It'll be hard to tie him down. So if I can't tie both, then I might as well tie the 'weaker' one.
- <Eilinel> /rofl!!!!
- <erialis> Sooooo? Don't tell me that a weakened Wicked, blushing and looking so delicious...
- <Eilinel> OMG. Eri, you are evil!!!
- <erialis> ...And panting... His hair disheveled, kneeling in front of you... Don't tell me that doesn't appeal to you more than Gui does?
- <Erihppas> Oh yes. Yesss... A weakened Wicked will appeal to me more... 8D





s erik hime4 julyflurry kat kii koost3r serao shadowrebirth shonen19 smerian s

<erialis> Final question! What are the best and worst parts of translating or proof-reading?

<smerian> The worst part of translating is when I have to look up Chinese words I don't know all over the Internet and get garbled answers.

<Serao> Okay, worst part of proof-reading...the first time I saw one of those paragraph-long sentences I almost got hives. But it's mostly pain-free. Except when there's lots of pain. Best part is getting to read it first! Yeah, that's right. *gloats*

<k00st3r> Worst part: Long strings of characters that stop making sense to me due to seemingly contradictory statements. Best part is reading it before everyone and remembering random moments from the manhua.

<Spence> Hardest part is diction, there are thoughts and phrases in Chinese that cannot be translated and still retain their meaning. Every time I see that I die a little inside... Best part is the random sentences that just pop up and they'll sound just hilarious. –thinks of the egg sentence-

<erialis> Egg sentence... "Right. Gui, quick hatch Fire Phoenix!" /image of Gui perched atop a giant egg like a mother hen pops into head/

<SR> Worst part of proof-reading...having to change long sentences so that they make sense but still keep their meaning, only they still don't make sense when you're done... >>; Best part is reading the story. Sometimes I find that I'm just reading and not editing and then I have to go back and start editing again. X3

<Eilinel> Best part...is knowing all the cool people in the team. Worst part...all those Chinese proverbs, they kill me. XD

<Erihppas> The hardest part is probably when I have to ponder whether to follow everything word-by-word. Like, translating everything literally. And best...yeah, getting to know everyone, and...

<Eilinel> Promoting ½ Prince! My dream!

<Erihppas> Mm, the fact that other ½ Prince fans get to read the novels and love ½ Prince even more...that too is satisfying. More discussions! More things to share, more people to squeal at~ 8D etc.

<Eilinel> Haha, yes! It's lonely to find something good but have no one to share it with.

<erialis> **And so we've come to the end of our little Q-and-A session. We hope that you guys had as much fun reading ½ Prince as we did in translating and proof-reading it. See you in volume 2!**



Volume 1 End

Compilation of Footnotes

You've been reading ½ Prince. There's a particular footnote that you're trying to find, but after three minutes of scrolling around looking for it, you're starting to feel pretty *pissed off*... Well, thankfully that scenario will never happen, because we've thoughtfully compiled the footnotes here for you. They're categorized under *Chinese Cultural/Linguistic References*, *Gamer References*, and *Others*, and arranged alphabetically after that.

Chinese Cultural/Linguistic References

Brightest future/“bright” future: This was originally meant to be a pun. What Lolidragon says is actually, “有前途” (yǒu qián tú), meaning “has a bright future”, while Prince replies with, “有钱途” (yǒu qián tú), meaning “a lucrative future”, which sounds identical to the earlier phrase. The first “qián” is the Chinese character for “front” or “forward”, while the latter “qián” is the character for “money”.

Chu Liu Xiang: Written as “楚留香” in Chinese, this is the name of the protagonist of a Chinese novel (titled after the protagonist). Think of him as a Chinese version of Robin Hood (taking from the rich and giving to the poor), with a formal yet urbane way of speaking. He is also extremely popular with the ladies.

Dao: A type of sword that features predominantly in Chinese culture. They are single-edged and may have fairly broad blades, thus resembling chopping knives at times (so you can guess just why Prince picked this weapon). Although they occasionally resemble sabres, their hilts are quite different (among other things). For a manga example of a dao, please refer to Ling Yao’s weapon in *Fullmetal Alchemist*. For more information on the dao, check out Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dao_\(sword\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dao_(sword)).

Dragon’s XX: When it comes to herbs and tonics, there are all kinds of weird Chinese recipes involving all kinds of weird ingredients, such as monkey brains. In this case, dragon’s XX is basically a cure for impotency (those game developers in *Second Life* must have been very bored). Interestingly enough, the word used here for “XX” actually means “whip”.

“The Eagle and the Mother Hen” game: A children’s game in a number of Asian countries, with variations. The game requires three or more players, with one player as the “Eagle”, one as the “Mother Hen” and the others as the “Chicks”. The chicks line up behind the

mother hen and hang onto the person in front of them while the Eagle tries to catch the chicks by touching them. Once the mother hen loses all her chicks, the game is over.

'Fēi, Cháng Dui' ... 'Fēi Cháng, Dui': Both are written and pronounced as “非常队” (prn. fēi cháng duì), but their meanings are significantly different, with the former meaning “Not, Normal Squad” and the latter meaning “Very, Squad” (which is nonsensical). The reason for the difference is because the same Chinese characters, when grouped differently, have different meanings.

In the first one, “fēi” stands on its own, and means “not”, while “cháng” (which means “regular” or “normal”) is grouped with “duì”, which means “squad”, hence the result is “not, normal squad”, or “Odd Squad”. In the second version, “fēi” and “cháng” have been grouped together and together they actually mean “very” or “extreme”, hence “Very, Squad”. Although this is the incorrect interpretation of Odd Squad’s name, most of the other players in *Second Life* believed this to be Odd Squad’s name initially (hence everybody thought they were weird).

Flurry of Musical Notes: In Chinese, this is written as “群音乱舞” (prn. qún yīng luàn wǔ) – the mental image it provokes is something like a flock of ducks scattering in panic (but substitute the ducks with musical notes). This may be a pun on the phrase “群莺乱舞” (prn. qún yīng luàn wǔ, pronunciation is exactly the same), which means a gathering of unchaste women. The character “莺” (prn. yīng) here refers to a type of bird, but is also used when referring to prostitutes. The skill appears to be an offensive-type spell, but this is not clearly stated.

Guazi: Written as “瓜子” (prn. guā zǐ) in Chinese, *guazi* are a curious sort of snack that’s especially popular during the Chinese New Year and are actually seeds that have been salted and dried. There are many types, including sunflower seeds, watermelon seeds, wintermelon seeds, and pumpkin seeds. Each seed is encased in a hard shell (its shape would resemble a flattened almond), and you have to bite them very carefully to get the seeds to crack open without crushing the “meat” within. They are much tougher to eat than peanuts.

Guqin: Written as “古琴” (prn. gǔ qín), which literally means “ancient stringed instrument”, this is a well-known type of Chinese musical instrument belonging to the zither family. It is usually associated with intelligence and grace. Fans of the ½ Prince manhua should note that the *guqin* actually looks quite different from how it was depicted in the manhua. The manhua version of Gui’s *guqin* resembles a cross between a *guqin* and a harp with its curved top and fairly short body, and it is played by Gui while held vertically. Actual *guqins* tend to have longer bodies, flat ends (that is, not curved), and are usually played while

placed on a flat surface with the strings facing up (although it is possible to play them the way Gui does in the manhua). For more information on the *guqin*, check out Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guqin>.

“The hero leaves, and will never return!” ...Ah, the piercing winds: This is a reference to Jing Ke (荆軻, *prn.* jīng kē), an assassin who lived during the Warring States Period. He was sent by Yan Dan (燕丹, *prn.* yàn dān), crown prince of Yan, to assassinate Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇, *prn.* qín shǐ huáng), emperor of Qin. According to ancient records, Jing Ke supposedly came up with this impromptu poem as he bade farewell to his friends on the banks of the river Yi – “风潇潇兮，易水寒，壮士一去兮不复返!” (*prn.* fēng xiāo xiāo xí, yì shuǐ hán, zhuàng shì yì qù xí bù fù fǎn), which can be translated as, “The piercing winds, ah, the freezing waters of the river Yi, the hero leaves, and he will never return!” So in the same sense, Prince and the others are (melodramatically) bidding Lolidragon farewell.

If you use a meat bun to hit a dog, you will never see the meat bun again: The original saying in Chinese is “肉包子打狗，有去无回” (*prn.* ròu bāo zǐ dǎ gǒu, yǒu qù wú huí). The underlying meaning is that such an action will definitely result in failure.

Jin Yong novel: Jin Yong is the author behind some of the most famous martial arts (or *wuxia*) novels of the past century, including The Legend of the Condor Heroes “射雕英雄传” (*prn.* shè diāo yīng xióng zhuàn), The Return of the Condor Heroes “神雕侠侣” (*prn.* shén diāo xiá lǚ) and The Laughing, Proud Wanderer “笑傲江湖” (*prn.* xiào ào jiāng hú).

Li Qing Zhao’s “Flower of Butterfly Love”: The lines which Gui penned in the letter are actually the lines of a poem by a famous poetess in Chinese history, 李清照 (*prn.* lǐ qīng zhào). Li Qing Zhao (1084 to approx. 1155 A.D.) lived during the Song dynasty. She was born into a fairly well-to-do family, with a scholarly father and an artsy family, and began to write poems in her youth. When she was eighteen, Li Qing Zhao married. She was extremely close to her husband, and their marriage was a happy one until war and civil strife separated them. Her husband passed away approximately two years after, leaving her heartbroken.

«蝶恋花» (*prn.* dié liàn huā), the title of the poem, literally means “the flower of a butterfly’s love”. The poem is written in “wén yán wén”, a style of writing often used in poetry and even general writing in the past. The notable feature of *wén yán wén* is that it condenses many words into very few words. As a result, each line of the poem is actually packed with meaning, but it’s almost like reading a poem that only has nouns and adjectives in it. That’s one of the reasons why Wolf (and everyone else, except Gui) are absolutely lost after reading the poem – because very few people these days actually know how to read stuff written in *wén yán wén*!

In Chinese, the poem reads, “暖雨晴风初破冻，柳眼梅腮，已觉春心动。酒意诗情谁与共？泪融残粉花钿重。乍试夹衫金缕缝，山枕斜欹，枕损钗头凤。独抱浓愁无好梦，夜阑犹翦灯花弄。” (Note that the original poems rhymes.)

The persona is that of a lady, who is sitting by the window, admiring the view outside as Spring arrives. The willow's leaves and the plum blossoms remind her of eyes and cheeks respectively, and she is reminded also of happier times early in her marriage. Seeing the beautiful sight, her feelings awaken – feelings of extreme sorrow. Her husband is away, and she remembers the times when he was by her side, and longs for his return.

Her sorrow overcomes her; her tears ruin her makeup and even the pins in her hair feel heavy. Thus, she stays indoors rather than head outdoors, even though she has already tried on the new clothes for Spring. She lies on her bed (thus her pillow dents – hence the mention of “cliffs”) and ruins her hair adornments. She attempts to find some peace in good dreams, but is unable to even enter the realms of sleep. Finally, it is already night, and in the silence she lights a lamp to lessen her solitude.

Li'l Strong: In Chinese, this nickname is written as “小强” (*prn. xiao qiang*) – which is also a colloquial way of referring to cockroaches.

Lolidragon-jiějie: The suffix is written in Chinese as “姐姐”, meaning “older sister”.

Luck at attracting people: The actual phrase used here is “桃花运” (*prn. táo huā yùn*) – *táo huā* refers to the cherry blossom flowers and *yùn* means luck. For its meaning, think of it as “the flower's luck at attracting the birds and bees”. As such, Prince is mocking her own luck at attracting such weird people.

Mantou: A Chinese bun without any fillings.

Number 4444: Chinese usually considers the number ‘four’ inauspicious because it is a homonym for ‘death’ in their language. To read up more about this, check out Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetraphobia>.

Odd Squad: Written in Chinese as “非常队” (*prn. fēi cháng duì*).

Pigs' intestines: Grossed out? Don't be. Pigs' intestines are a pretty popular Chinese dish – what they do, of course, is remove all the icky stuff (obviously) and then braise it (like braised duck), often with lots of dark soy sauce, together with slices of pork, bean curd (tofu), sliced pig's stomach, pig's liver, and in some cases, pig's skin... Sounds really gross, but you'll understand if you ever get to eat it.

Sheng-ge Entrancement Technique: “Sheng-ge” is written as “笙歌” (*prn.* shēng gē). The first character, “shēng”, refers to a Chinese woodwind musical instrument made of reed. The second character, “gē”, means “song”, thus “shēng gē” refers to a song that played using a *shēng*. Do note that Gui *isn’t* actually using a *shēng*. For more information on the *sheng*, check out Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheng_\(instrument\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheng_(instrument)).

Stylish robe: Just think of the clothes guys wear in Chinese period dramas.

The way...must part: In Chinese, this is “此路是我开，此树是我栽，要打此处过，留下帅哥来” (*prn.* cǐ lù shì wǒ kāi, cǐ shù shì wǒ zāi, yào dǎ cǐ chù guò, liú xià shuài gē lái), and a literal translation would be “I open this road, I plant this tree, if you want to go on your way, leave the hottie here”. The phrase originated from some *wuxia* novel or another (sans the hottie part) and it is basically a threat couched in flowery language.

Whip: In case you didn’t read footnote 50, the word used for “XX” in “Dragon’s XX” actually means “whip”.

Wolf-dàgē: The suffix is written in Chinese as “大哥”, meaning “big brother” or “elder brother”.

Wuxia: Written as “武侠” (*wǔ xiá*) in Chinese, the term literally means “martial arts hero”. A *wuxia* novel, such as *The Return of the Condor Heroes*, often has a myriad of characters who are all masters of martial arts or notables in the pugilistic world and each would usually have a specially name set (or sets) of skills.

Yang Guo’s Melancholic Palms: Yang Guo is the protagonist of the novel *The Return of the Condor Heroes*, written by Jin Yong. Yang Guo was the son of Yang Kang, the villain in the prequel novels *The Legend of the Condor Heroes*. Even as a young boy, he was shunned by many, because they believed that he would grow up to be just like his father. He meets and falls in love with Xiao Long Nü, the female protagonist, a martial arts practitioner five years his senior who also becomes his teacher. (Note that Xiao Long Nü literally means “Little Dragon Girl”; this is Lolidragon’s name, but because most readers are more comfortable with “Lolidragon”, we’ve stuck to using that.)

Their supposedly “indecent” relationship, as well as their martial arts skill and Xiao Long Nü’s beauty led them into a lot of trouble and they were separated many times. Subsequently, Yang Guo and Xiao Long Nü were poisoned by their enemies, but they managed to obtain a single dose of antidote. Xiao Long Nü later vanished, leaving behind an obscure message on a cliff about having found another cure, and telling Yang Guo that they would reunite in sixteen years. Everyone (excepting Yang Guo) understood the truth,

which was that Xiao Long Nü had committed suicide in order to save Yang Guo, who would have no choice but to take the antidote.

Yang Guo waited faithfully, however, and the despair he felt from his separation from Xiao Long Nü was channeled into the *Melancholic Palms* (“黯然销魂掌”, prn. àn rán xiāo hún zhǎng), a set of moves so powerful that they rivaled the most powerful martial arts skills. However, the power of the *Melancholic Palms* depended greatly on the user’s state of mind – the more despair and sorrow felt, the greater its power. In the end, it turned out that somehow Xiao Long Nü did survive, and the lovers were reunited.

Yangtze swells with each new wave, shore becomes the waves’ mass grave: In Chinese, this is “长江后浪推前浪, 前浪死在沙滩上” (prn. cháng jiāng hòu làng tuī qián làng, qián làng sǐ zài shā tān shàng) and when translated more literally, means “On the Yangtze, the waves behind pushes on the waves in front, so the wave in front dies on the shore”. The proverb basically means that the generation will take over and surpass their predecessors. Note that this is not the real version of the proverb in this version used here by the author, the second half of the proverb has been changed to give it a slightly more comical and irreverent tone.

You tiao: Deep-fried bread sticks. There are huge air pockets in the flour, so even though it’s deep-fried, the inside is actually quite fluffy. A popular Chinese snack or breakfast food.

Yu Lian-dàsǎo: The suffix is written in Chinese as “大嫂”, meaning “sister-in-law”. It is usually only used on the wife of one’s elder brother, however.

Yuan-yang: This refers to mandarin ducks, and it is written as “鸳鸯” in simplified Chinese. Mandarin ducks are notable symbols of conjugal love and fidelity as they can often be found in pairs. The phrase used by Wu Qing to describe Prince and Lolidragon here is actually “鸳鸯侠侣” (prn. yuān yāng xiá lǚ), with the last two characters referring to a heroic couple or, more accurately, a pair of fighters who are also lovers, like Yang Guo and Xiao Long Nü. If you add in the symbolism of the yuan-yang, it implies that Prince and Lolidragon are fated lovers.

Za cui noodles: An unusual noodle dish that seems to be very popular in Hong Kong and Taiwan. It often includes carrots, pig’s skin, curry fishballs, pig’s blood, and pig’s intestines, together with the noodles.

Gamer References

Aggro: In most RPGs, mobs (monsters) generally attack players on sight or when they enter a certain range (unless the players grossly out-level the mobs); “to aggro” refers as such to the (often unintentional) act of drawing close enough to a mob to trigger an attack. However, to prevent newbies from being overwhelmed when starting out, most early-game mobs (in Prince’s case, the man-eating slimes) do not attack players unless they are first attacked.

AOE: This stands for “Area of Effect”, a gamer term for attacks that deal damage within a certain area. Such attacks are usually quite devastatingly powerful and are used for crowd control, but their weakness is the long amount of time needed for casting. Examples of AOE spells include Meteor Shower, Blizzard, and Earthquake (such skills may have different names in different games).

Buff: A skill or spell that boosts a character’s stats or has beneficial effects on the character(s) and usually lasts for some time. To “buff up” means for characters to use such skills and spells on themselves and party members, often in preparation for some major fighting.

Chun Li: Famous female character from the fighting game series, Street Fighter. She wears an outfit that vaguely looks like a cheong sam (or *qi pao*) and ties her hair up in two buns. She’s weak as hell at hand combat, but her leg attacks (or kicks) are quite strong, and her signature move is the Lightning Kick. She’s also the first female playable character in a fighting game (so girls often picked her when playing Street Fighters).

Debuff: A debuff is the opposite of a buff – while it lasts, it hampers the target in some way, such as by lower agility or strength (as opposed to increasing them).

Exploding Punch: Just a generic attack name. Similarly named moves appear in a wide number of comics and video games, including *King of Fighters*.

Game Master (GM): A rather old term, often used in RPGs such as D&D, as well as in MMORPGs such as WoW. In the first scenario, it refers to a person who is in charge of managing the role-playing game such that all players’ scenarios fit together coherently (among other things). In the latter scenario, the GM plays a similar role, although in a different capacity; they deal with bugs, player complaints, spam on trade and other channels, etc. GMs are also often said to have access to secret weapons, areas, etc.

To identify: Rare objects in *Second Life*, such as the shoes picked up by Prince and Lolidragon here, have their stats hidden and must be “identified” by the relevant NPC before players can see the item’s details. Games that have similar systems are Ragnarok Online and Guildwars, in which players have to use a magnifying glass and an identification kit respectively to check the stats for rare items.

Iori Yagami: A character from *King of Fighters*. He seems to be a pretty powerful character in the game, with the power to manipulate fire and a sadistic personality.

Iori Yagami’s Rage of the Eight Maidens: As mentioned before, Iori Yagami is a character from *King of Fighters* who manipulates fire. *Rage of the Eight Maidens* is one of his signature moves, where Iori uses several normal attacks from the front before grabbing his enemy and blowing them up. (Doesn’t sound like it can be done even in *Second Life*, though.) The move is supposedly inspired by an encounter Iori had with eight nuns in a dressing room...

MMO: This stands for “Massively Multiplayer Online” and refers to video games that may support huge numbers of players at any one time. These games are usually played via the Internet. One subcategory of the MMO is the MMORPG, or “Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game”. *Second Life* is an MMORPG.

Mob: Shortened form of “mobile object”, which is gamer lingo for anything that is non-player and can be killed for experience, quests, etc. It is used interchangeably in most (but not all) cases with “monster”.

Non-player Character (NPC): In MMOs, NPCs usually refer to characters that are not under the control of players, but are usually either allied with or neutral toward the players.

PM: This stands for “Private Message” in MMOs; “PMing” someone would mean sending them a message over the private message channel.

Power-level: Gamer lingo for when a comparatively high-level character helps a comparatively low-level character level up multiple times by running them through quests, areas, fights, dungeons, etc.

PvP: This is an acronym for “Player versus Player” and is used to describe in-game activities in which players are in direct competition with another real player (the Adventurer’s Tournament being a prime example). On the other hand, PvE (“Player versus Environment”) involves competition against AI-controlled monsters or other elements that are built into the game itself.

Reroll: Gamer lingo for creating one's character from scratch over again; may sometimes involve change of class (e.g. from a mage to a priest) or spec (e.g. from a fire mage to a frost mage).

Rising Dragon Fist: This is read as “*shōryū-ken*” in Japanese (and written as “昇龍拳” in Japanese kanji and “升龙拳” in simplified Chinese) and is a really famous move belonging to Ryu from the fighting game series, Street Fighter. The move is a one-hit blow that can only be executed successfully if the enemy is airborne.

Scroll of recall: In this case, a scroll used by the player to teleport them away to a city or a safe place. A WoW equivalent would be the Hearthstone or a mage/shaman's teleportation spell.

Other References

Blow dart: A blow dart is a weapon using a pipe to blow a projectile or dart to a target. The idea can be widely found in South East Asia and South America.

The Eye of the Soul: “亡灵之眼” (*prn. wáng líng zhī yǎn*) is a fantasy novel published by Adventurers' Heaven (which also published ½ Prince).

For love...punish you!: Reference to the Japanese manga and anime series, *Sailor Moon*. This is an obvious parody of the battle-cry used by Sailor Moon, the protagonist of the *Sailor Moon* series.

It's My Life: Song by Bon Jovi.

Kenshin's Nine-headed Dragon Strike: Kenshin is the main character from the manga *Rurouni Kenshin*, and the move *Nine-headed Dragon Strike* (“九頭龍閃” in Japanese kanji, *prn. kuzu-ryūsen*) is one of his moves. It is an unavoidable and deadly technique that requires a lot of speed to strike at the body's nine vital points. Prince often uses this attack in later chapters.

Meter: 1 meter = 100 centimeters = 3.28 feet.

Swaying Sword... Self-Defense: The techniques that Prince is using are a mix of famous techniques from Chinese novels, fighting game moves, normal moves and nonsense.

Swaying Sword Style, “荡剑式” (prn. dàng jiàn shì) and *Nine Swords of Du Gu* “独孤九剑” (prn. dú gū jiǔ jiàn) are both from Jin Yong’s The Laughing, Proud Wanderer, or “笑傲江湖” (prn. xiào ào jiāng hú). *Toast to the Eight* is a move belonging to Iori Yagami from *King of Fighters*. “Ten” Strike, “十字斩” (prn. shí zì zhǎn) seems to be from another game as well (note that the character for “ten” in Chinese is written like a cross, hence the name). *Quick Sword Technique*, “拔刀术” (prn. bò dāo sù) refers to the fairly common move of quickly unsheathing one’s blade and, with a single stroke, destroying the enemy. The rest are fairly self-explanatory.

Tiara: Although tiaras are usually worn on top of the head (like a mini-crown), the one that Prince is wearing is the type that’s a band around the forehead, as depicted in the manhua. It can still be considered a tiara, however.

Watson’s: A famous convenience store. They sell shampoo, snacks, boxes, makeup, and even some medicines.

